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# CAMPBELL'S EXPERIMENT



By NINA  
RHOADES

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**RUTH CAMPBELL'S  
EXPERIMENT**

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"HE TURNED WITH A START, AND REGARDED HIS VISITOR CURIOUSLY."

# RUTH CAMPBELL'S EXPERIMENT

*A STORY*

BY

NINA RHOADES

AUTHOR OF "ONLY DOLLAR," "THE LITTLE GIRL NEXT DOOR,"  
"SILVER LININGS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

WILLIAM F. STECHER



W. A. WILDE COMPANY

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CHICAGO

10. VISITOR FREQUENCY.

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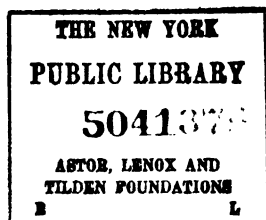
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RUTH CAMPBELL'S EXPERIMENT.

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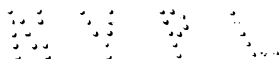
# Ruth Campbell's Experiment



## CHAPTER I

### RUTH COMES HOME

IT was a dull, cloudy afternoon toward the end of January, and the Chicago Limited was making up for lost time. There was nothing very attractive in the wintry landscape, and Mrs. Trafford turned her attention from the car window, and fell to watching instead the face of the girl who was sharing her section. A very pretty, bright young face it was, so full of hope and expectation that Mrs. Trafford breathed a little half-conscious sigh. She had only known Ruth Campbell for twenty-four hours, and yet, even in that short time, had grown to like the girl more than she generally liked people on so short an acquaintance. If she had a daughter like that, she reflected, a



little sadly, life might be so very different. A childless widow of fifty is sometimes just a little lonely.

As if becoming suddenly conscious of her companion's scrutiny, Ruth threw down her book, and looked up with a smile.

"We shall be in Albany in half an hour," Mrs. Trafford remarked. "Is your book interesting?"

"Yes, rather, but I am afraid I haven't been thinking very much about it lately. You see, there are so many other things to think about. It is a rather tremendous thing to realize that one's school days are really over at last, and that one is going home for the first time in eight years."

Mrs. Trafford looked surprised.

"Do you mean that you have never been at home in all that time?" she asked; "not even for a vacation?"

The color rose in the girl's cheeks, and her dark eyes had a rather troubled look in them as she answered:—

"No, never. I suppose it does seem rather strange to you, but neither Miss Molton nor

my uncle liked to have me travel alone. It is a long journey from Chicago to New York, you know. I spent some of my vacations with school friends, and others with Miss Molton. I was very happy at school, but of course it is most exciting to be actually going home at last."

"Your uncle has been to see you, I suppose?"

"N-no, he hasn't. He hates travelling, he says, and then he isn't very young. He was ten years older than my father."

"Is your uncle your only living relative?" Mrs. Trafford asked, with growing interest.

"I have a half-brother some years older than myself, but I haven't seen him, either, since I was a child."

"Indeed! and is his home also in New York?"

"I don't know; I never hear from him. He and my uncle quarrelled when I was a little girl, and he went away from home."

"But have you no aunts or cousins,—no female relations of any kind?"

Ruth laughed.

"No," she said frankly, "I don't believe I

have a single one. The fact is, I know very little about my own people. My father and mother both died before I was two years old, and my uncle took my brother and me to live with him, because, I suppose, there was no one else to take us. I don't think he was very fond of children, for I remember I never saw much of him when I was little, but of course all that will be different now that I am grown up."

"Your brother was much older than yourself, you say?"

"Oh, yes, more than ten years. I remember him very well, a big, tall boy, full of life and fun. I don't think he and my uncle got on well together; Uncle John said Arthur was wild, but he was always kind to me, and I was very fond of him."

"Did you ever know why your brother left home?" Mrs. Trafford was conscious of the fact that she was asking a great many questions, but this girl interested her very much.

"No, I suppose I was too young to have understood. I was only nine when it happened. I wondered at first why Arthur had

gone away, but when I asked my nurse, she told me I mustn't talk about it, that Arthur had made Uncle John very angry, and that he would never come back any more. I remember I was very unhappy, and cried a good deal, but she comforted me by telling me that perhaps some day Arthur would take me to live with him. I don't think the servants were very fond of my uncle; he was rather strict about things, and Arthur was always kind and pleasant with every one, so it was only natural that they should take his part. Very soon after that Uncle John sent me to school. I remember how distressed I was at the idea of leaving every one, especially my nurse, who had always been good to me. I was put under the care of the conductor on the train, and had to take the long journey all by myself."

"I never heard of such a thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Trafford, indignantly. "To send a child of ten years old travelling about the world by herself! What was your uncle thinking of?"

"Well, you see, the journey was rather expensive, and then Uncle John had never had any children of his own, so he didn't understand

about such things as some people might have done. After all, I got on very well, for some people on the train were very kind to me, and when we reached Chicago, there was dear Miss Molton waiting for me, and of course everything was all right after that. Uncle John had known Miss Molton when she lived in the East, and it was so good of him to send me to her instead of to some school nearer home, which he might easily have done. He knew how good she was, you see."

"She is a good woman," Mrs. Trafford agreed heartily. "I have only met her two or three times myself, but have heard a great deal about her from our mutual friends the Monroes. And so you have been at school all these years, and now you are eighteen, are you not?"

"Yes, I was eighteen last month. Miss Molton was disappointed that Uncle John would not let me stay till the end of the term. I was sorry, too, at first, for I should have graduated in June, but then it is so delightful to know that Uncle John really needs me and has sent for me at last."

"Did he give any particular reason for wanting you just now?" Mrs. Trafford asked.

"No, his letter was very short. He merely said he had decided to have me leave school, and wished me to come home as soon as possible. He sent the money for my journey. I should have been obliged to go all the way alone if Mrs. Monroe had not happened to mention to Miss Molton that you were staying with her, and expected to leave for New York yesterday. It was very kind of you to let me share your section."

"It has been a real pleasure to me," said Mrs. Trafford, kindly. "You must come to see me in New York. I live with a married sister, and I think you would like my nieces. But here we are in Albany at last. Let us go out on the platform, and get a breath of fresh air."

Three hours later the Chicago Limited was steaming slowly into the Grand Central Station.

"Do you think you will recognize your uncle?" Mrs. Trafford asked, as she and Ruth gathered up their belongings and made their



way out to the brightly lighted platform. "He will be here to meet you, I suppose!"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I shall know him," the girl answered confidently, "though I doubt if he recognizes me. I sent him a photograph three or four years ago, but he has not seen me since I was ten, you know."

Next moment they were standing in the crowded station, peering anxiously about in search of familiar faces. Mrs. Trafford was speedily claimed by a stout, middle-aged gentleman, whom she introduced to Ruth as "my brother-in-law, Mr. Grant," but though the girl scanned every approaching figure with eager scrutiny, she saw no one who even remotely resembled the uncle she was expecting.

"Perhaps he has made a mistake about the hour," Mr. Grant suggested, when they had waited fully five minutes, and still Ruth's uncle did not appear. "I have a carriage waiting outside; you had better let us drop you at your friends'."

Ruth hesitated, and glanced apprehensively at the rapidly dispersing crowd.

"I hate to give you so much trouble," she

said. "There must be some mistake, and yet I can't understand it, for I wrote Uncle John just what time the train was due in New York, and Miss Molton sent a telegram from the station in Chicago yesterday. If you would get a cab for me, I am sure I could manage by myself."

Mr. Grant looked doubtful, and Mrs. Trafford settled the question by saying decidedly: —

"We will leave you at your uncle's, dear; you told me his address, and it is only a little out of our way."

Five minutes later they were rattling down Madison Avenue in a two-horse hack. It was a rather silent drive. Mrs. Trafford and her brother-in-law exchanged a few remarks, but Ruth had grown suddenly very quiet. She was vaguely uncomfortable, even a little frightened. Could her uncle be ill, she wondered, and even if so, why had no one been sent to meet her? It certainly was very strange.

"See, dear, this is Madison Square," Mrs. Trafford's kind voice broke in on her anxious

questionings. "I don't suppose you remember much about New York; you were such a child when you went away."

"I remember some things pretty well," said Ruth, rousing herself to take an interest in her surroundings. "It all looks familiar, and yet changed, too. We are almost home now; I remember this corner."

As she spoke, the carriage turned into one of the side streets. It was a quiet street, lined on both sides with old-fashioned, rather shabby-looking houses. It had once been a fashionable neighborhood, but fashion had moved away to give place to business, and some of the houses had already been turned into stores, while others were let out to dressmakers, milliners, and offices of various kinds. Before a house rather more shabby and dilapidated than the rest, the driver brought his horses to a stand.

"We will wait and see you safely inside," Mrs. Trafford said, as Ruth turned to bid her new friends good-by. The girl's cheeks were flushed, and she was trembling with suppressed excitement. "You won't forget to

come and see me, and let me know how you get on, will you? This is my card."

Ruth promised that she would surely come, gave Mrs. Trafford's hand a grateful squeeze, and hurried out of the carriage and up the steps of the house which she dimly remembered as having once been home. Mr. Grant rang the bell, and they both waited for several minutes on the steps. Ruth's heart was beating very fast and Mr. Grant himself was beginning to look a little anxious, when at last approaching footsteps were heard, and the door was opened by an old woman in a soiled calico dress.

"Is Uncle John,—I mean is Mr. Campbell at home?" Ruth inquired in a voice that was not quite steady.

"Yes, he is," returned the woman, shortly.

"I am his niece. Do you know whether he is expecting me this evening?"

"Oh, yes, he's expecting you; dinner's been kept back for half an hour."

Mr. Grant shook hands and hurried back to his cab, and then Ruth found herself standing in a wide, old-fashioned hall, in which a single

gas jet was burning dimly. She gave one quick glance about her, and turned once more to her taciturn companion.

"I hope my uncle isn't ill."

"He's all right. He's in the library, the second floor front. I suppose I can get dinner up, now that you've come."

The old woman shuffled away, and Ruth hurried upstairs to her uncle's library. On the way she noticed several things. The stair carpet was decidedly faded, and there was more dust than was at all agreeable on the balusters.

The library door was closed, and Ruth paused outside for a moment before knocking. She had to wink rather hard to keep back the tears, for this was not exactly the home-coming she had been dreaming of all through the long journey from Chicago. All at once she realized that she was both cold and tired. Then she raised her hand, and tapped resolutely at the library door.

"Come in," called a dimly remembered voice, and Ruth turned the handle and entered.

"Here I am, Uncle John, safe and sound, and so happy to be at home again."

A small, shrivelled old man was sitting in an arm-chair drawn close to the fire. At the sound of the bright young voice in the doorway, he turned with a start, and regarded his visitor curiously. He had keen, bright eyes, and a sharp, alert manner, but, on the whole, his countenance was not an attractive one.

"Oh, you've come at last, have you?" he remarked gruffly. "Shut the door, please; it's cold in the halls. I won't have a furnace fire in my house; it isn't healthy. What made you so late? I've been expecting you for an hour and more."

"The train was a little behind time," Ruth explained, as she closed the door and approached the fire. "I am so glad you are all right, Uncle John; I was afraid you might be ill, or that something had happened."

She would have kissed him, but he held out the ends of two cold fingers, and she decided that he might prefer shaking hands, so did that instead.

"What made you think there was anything the matter with me?" Mr. Campbell inquired curiously.

"I thought—I had an idea that you might be at the station to meet me," faltered Ruth, her color deepening under her uncle's keen scrutiny.

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, my rheumatism is apt to be troublesome in cold weather, and I don't go out after dark. You found your way all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, a friend of Miss Molton's took charge of me on the train, and her brother-in-law met her at the station with a cab. They left me here."

"I thought you'd get on. It's time you learned to take care of yourself, anyway. You are eighteen, are you not?"

"Yes, just eighteen."

"I thought so; that's why I sent for you. A woman ought to have learned all she needs to know by the time she's eighteen. Now go and get ready for dinner. We dine at six, and it's nearly seven already. We keep old-fashioned hours in this house, and Martha doesn't like to be kept waiting, I can tell you."

"Am I to have my old room, the dear old

nursery on the third floor?" Ruth asked, trying hard to keep the quiver out of her voice.

"Yes, I suppose so; I told Martha to get it ready. Martha's not as young as she was once, and you may not find things to suit you, but you'll have to make the best of it."

"Is Martha the old woman who let me in?" Ruth inquired with natural curiosity.

"Yes, of course; how many servants do you suppose I keep?"

Ruth felt sure that if she lingered another moment the tears would come in spite of all her efforts, so she turned quickly away, and hurried upstairs to the room which had once been the nursery. Here she found that preparations had evidently been made for her reception; the bed was made, the gas lighted, and the water pitcher filled. One glance about the once familiar room was all she dared allow herself. Her uncle was waiting with dinner for her, and she knew that if she once let her long pent up feelings have their way, the storm would be a long and bitter one. For years she had been longing for home, and this was home.

When she came downstairs again ten minutes



later, her uncle was already at the dinner table, with Martha standing behind his chair. He motioned to her to take the place opposite to him, and the meal began. Greasy soup, chops badly burned on the outside, baked potatoes, boiled rice, and a tapioca pudding. The tablecloth had a hole in it, and Ruth had a suspicion that the knives and forks had not been cleaned very recently. Mr. Campbell, however, appeared quite satisfied with the state of affairs, and made no remarks on the subject. He was not conversationally inclined, and after he had asked a few questions about his old friends, the Moltons, and about his niece's journey, he relapsed into silence, which seemed habitual to him. Ruth did her best to be bright and entertaining, but it was not easy work, and before dinner was over she had almost given it up.

A little diversion was caused by the arrival of Ruth's trunk. Martha accompanied the expressman upstairs, and on her return announced in her usual laconic fashion: —

“There's forty cents to collect.”

Mr. Campbell frowned, and Ruth hastily drew out her purse.

"I have the money, Martha," she said; "here it is."

"That's right," Mr. Campbell remarked in a tone of satisfaction, as Martha left the room; "I am glad to see you haven't spent all your money."

"Oh, no," said Ruth, blushing; "I have nearly ten dollars left. It was very kind of you to send such a big check, Uncle John."

"Hm! well, I said I'd pay for your education, and I've kept my word. I won't say that it's always been easy, for I'm not a rich man."

Ruth felt as if she ought to say something grateful, but a lump rose in her throat when she tried to speak, and consequently nothing more was said on the subject.

They went back to the library after dinner, and Mr. Campbell resumed his seat by the fire. Ruth, finding that her uncle did not seem inclined to talk, took up an old magazine that she found on the table and tried to read, but the letters danced before her eyes, and at the end of half an hour she suddenly realized that she could not remember a single word of what she had been reading.

As the clock struck half-past eight, Ruth rose.

"I think if you will excuse me, Uncle John," she said, "I should like to go to bed. I am a little tired from my journey."

Mr. Campbell, who had fallen into a doze, started up at the sound of his niece's voice.

"Going to bed, are you? Well, that's all right. We keep early hours in this house, as I told you before. I'm generally in bed myself by nine. The days are long enough to suit me, and I can't see the use in wasting unnecessary gas. If you want anything, you'd better try and get it for yourself; Martha doesn't like being asked to do extra work. She isn't a very amiable old person, but I don't want to lose her, for she's faithful and economical, two traits that are not often found in servants nowadays."

"I shall try not to give any more trouble than I can possibly help," said Ruth, hurriedly. "I shall be glad to help Martha in any way I can. Good night, Uncle John."

In her room, with the door securely locked behind her, Ruth's first act was to fling herself face downward on the bed, and let the long repressed storm of tears have its way.

## CHAPTER II

### MR. CAMPBELL STATES HIS INTENTIONS

“**A**ND now, Uncle John, won't you tell me what I can do for you?”

Breakfast was over, and Ruth and her uncle were standing together at the foot of the stairs. Ruth spoke cheerfully. She had risen that morning with the firm determination to make the best of things, however different the reality might be from her bright anticipations. Troubles seldom look quite so black by daylight as they do at night, and by the time she had finished dressing, she had almost reasoned herself into the belief that her conduct of the preceding evening had been extremely foolish. Her uncle's greeting had scarcely been a cordial one, it is true, but then, she reflected, he was probably eccentric, and eccentric people, especially in books, frequently turned out to

be most interesting and delightful characters. She remembered that, as a child, she had heard the servants speak of Mr. Campbell as being "rather close." She had not then understood what the expression meant, but she was wiser now, and could not help wondering if her uncle's "closeness" had not increased with years. Certainly the establishment had not been conducted on quite such an economical basis in the days of her childhood. Still, when a man lived alone and was growing old, he was not to be blamed for being a little odd. She would be very kind and patient with him, and by and by, when he had really begun to be fond of her, things would be quite different, of course.

Breakfast had not proved a particularly cheerful meal. Mr. Campbell had wished his niece a curt "good morning," had then become absorbed in his newspaper, and made no further remarks during the meal. The bright morning sunshine was scarcely calculated to improve the appearance of things. The house was certainly very shabby, and Martha, waiting on the breakfast table in a torn apron that had

once been white, did not add much to the cheerful aspect of things in general. Still, Ruth's determination did not waver.

At his niece's question, Mr. Campbell paused with his foot on the bottom step of the stairs and eyed her curiously.

"What did you expect to do for me when you came?" he inquired gruffly.

"I—I didn't know exactly," faltered Ruth, somewhat taken back by this abrupt question. "I thought you might like to have me write your letters, or read to you, and—and perhaps keep house."

"I am quite capable of attending to my own correspondence, thank you, and I never could endure to hear a person read aloud. Martha looks after the housekeeping, and does it much better than a girl of your age possibly could. I have something to say to you, but you'd better go and make your bed first. I told Martha that you would keep your room in order. She's too old to have extra work thrust upon her."

"Certainly, Uncle John; we always attended to our own rooms at school. Shall I find you in the library when I come down?"

"Yes, but don't be too long about it, for I'm in a hurry. I have an appointment down town at ten o'clock."

Ruth hurried away upstairs. She tried to sing a snatch of a song as she went, but the words seemed to stick in her throat, and she speedily gave up the attempt. Fifteen minutes later she was standing at the library door.

"Do you wish to speak to me now, Uncle John?"

Mr. Campbell glanced up from the note he was writing, and nodded.

"Sit down," he said; "I shall be ready in a moment."

Ruth obeyed, and as she did so inwardly resolved to take advantage of her uncle's absence that morning, by trying to make that room at least a little more presentable. She might not be considered sufficiently experienced to attempt housekeeping, but there certainly could be no objection to her disposing of some of the superfluous trash that was overflowing the scrap basket, or removing the dust which was thickly sprinkled over every article of furniture. Martha might be a treasure in her way, but it

was evident that several days at least must have elapsed since a duster had been used in that room. In a few minutes Mr. Campbell finished his note, and pushed his chair back from the desk.

"Well," he began abruptly, "I'm ready to talk now, and, in the first place, I want to ask you a question. What do you suppose I sent for you to come home for?"

"I—I don't know, Uncle John; I thought you might have needed me for something—possibly to keep house for you."

"Fiddlesticks! what should I want a girl of your age to keep house for? You're a strong, healthy young woman, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; I am never ill."

"That's good; you're not bad-looking either, as girls go. I suppose you've had about as good an education as most young people of your age?"

"I think so, Uncle John. Miss Molton was always very particular about my studies, and I won the first prize in mathematics last spring."

"Do you think you would make a good teacher?"



The question came so suddenly, and was so unexpected, that Ruth gave a little start.

"I—I don't really know," she stammered; "I never thought about it."

"Never thought about it, eh! and what did you expect to do when you left school? Sit down and fold your hands, perhaps?"

Ruth's heart was beginning to beat uncomfortably fast, and a wave of crimson swept over her face.

"I am afraid I never thought very much on the subject," she said frankly. "Of course, Uncle John, I don't wish to be a burden to you, and if you think —"

"There, there, you needn't get so excited; there's nothing to cry about, only it's best we should understand each other, that's all."

Ruth choked back a rising sob, and Mr. Campbell went on in his gruff, abrupt fashion.

"When your father died, leaving two helpless children, without a penny between them, I agreed to look after you and your brother, give you both an education, and start you fair in the world. Your brother turned out an ungrateful scamp, and I soon washed my hands of him.

When you were old enough, I sent you to the best school I knew of, and I've kept you there for eight years. I've supplied the money for your clothes, and I don't think I've ever stinted you in anything. It hasn't always been easy, for I'm not a rich man, remember; but when I say I'll do a thing, I stick to my agreement. Well, you're eighteen; you've had a good education, and as good a start as I can give you. I've done my share, and the long and short of it is, I expect you to look after yourself in future."

Ruth gave one little gasp, and for a dreadful moment her heart almost seemed to stand still. She had led such a happy, sheltered life at school, the thought of ever having to battle with the world had never even presented itself to her mind. She had always supposed that her uncle was a wealthy man, and that by and by, when her school days were over, she would go to live with him. She would probably go into society, like other girls she had heard of, and perhaps sometime she would marry some nice man, who would be very kind to her and make her very happy. And now, in one single moment as it

seemed, her whole future had changed. It was all so sudden that she could not think of a word to say.

Mr. Campbell waited in silence for a moment, as if expecting his niece to make some remark. Then he rose.

"Well, I must be off," he observed in a tone which he evidently intended to be one of cheerful unconcern; "I shall be back to luncheon. In the meantime you can think over what I've said, and make up your mind what you'd like to do. Of course, if you don't consider yourself qualified for a teacher, you can adopt some other profession, — typewriting or bookkeeping, for instance. I don't say that I'm not willing to help you along a little at first, but you'll have to find some other place to live. I can't have you staying here long. It makes extra work for Martha; I had hard work to get her to consent to your coming at all. She threatened to leave if I brought a young girl into the house, but I compromised with her by promising that you shouldn't stay more than a week. We can talk things over more thoroughly when I come back this after-

noon, but I shall be late for my appointment if I stay any longer now. Good-by."

"Good-by, Uncle John," said Ruth, quietly. "I will think over what you have told me, and this afternoon I will tell you my decision."

Ruth sat quite still for some time after her uncle had left her. She heard the front door close, and after that everything was silent. Martha was evidently in the kitchen, and she had the whole of the upper part of the house to herself. Slowly the full significance of her uncle's words dawned upon her. She was not to be sheltered and cared for any longer. Her uncle did not even want her in his house. He had, according to his lights, done his duty by her. He had given her an education, and now he wished to be rid of her. Oh, why had he not told her this before she left Chicago? Miss Molton might have given her a position as assistant teacher, or at least she might have remained where she had friends. Ruth was no coward, but the suddenness of the shock had for the moment completely overwhelmed her, and laying her head down on the table beside her, she burst into a passion of tears.

A ring at the door-bell roused her at last. It was such an unexpected sound in that silent house, that it fairly made her jump, and springing hastily to her feet, she began drying her eyes vigorously. She heard Martha go to the door, a short conversation followed, and then the door closed, and quick, firm footsteps came up the stairs. Next moment there was a tap at the library door.

"May I come in?" inquired a cheery voice, and without waiting for permission, there entered a stout, florid old gentleman, with a bald head and a very pleasant face, who walked straight up to Ruth, and held out his hand.

"How do you do, my dear?" he said in a loud, hearty voice. "I don't suppose you know me, though I remember you very well. I am William Locke, your uncle's lawyer."

"Indeed I do remember you," cried Ruth, her face brightening, as the old gentleman took her hand in a warm, friendly clasp, and regarded her curiously from a pair of kindly gray eyes. "You were very good to me when I was a little girl. I haven't forgotten the

gum-drops and other good things that used to come out of your pocket; and didn't you take me to the circus once?"

"To think of your remembering that after all these years!" Mr. Locke was fairly beaming with pleasure. "Take you to the circus? To be sure I did, and enjoyed the show myself every bit as much as you did. Well, you've changed a good deal since those days, and not for the worse, either. I'm afraid I shouldn't have recognized you if we had happened to meet by accident."

"I was only ten when you saw me last," said Ruth, laughing. "I suppose one does change a good deal in appearance between the ages of ten and eighteen, but I believe I should have known you anywhere, Mr. Locke. Won't you sit down? Uncle John is out, but I am so glad to see an old friend."

"I came on purpose to see you," said the old gentleman, taking the proffered seat, and glancing around the room as he did so with an expression not altogether free from disgust. "I knew Campbell had an engagement down town this morning."

"You knew I was coming home, then?"

"Oh, yes. I happened to drop in on a matter of business, and your uncle told me you were expected. I thought you might not object to seeing an old friend, so decided on making an early call. That amiable old party who opens the door, declined to take up my card, but informed me where you were probably to be found. I hope you will excuse the lack of ceremony."

"It was very good of you to come," said Ruth, heartily. "I was just longing for somebody to talk to. I am afraid I shall have to begin by asking your advice, Mr. Locke."

"Hm! I thought that might be the case. Campbell has been informing you of his intentions, I suppose."

Mr. Locke glanced keenly at the girl as he spoke, and Ruth, conscious of her red eyes, felt herself blushing.

"Yes, he has," she admitted, trying hard to speak cheerfully; "that is, he has told me that he expects me to find something to do. It's only right, of course; he was very good to pay for my education."

"Right! Well, that depends on what one's ideas of right and wrong may be. If I had a pretty niece—but there, what's the use of talking? It's always the way in this world that what we want we haven't got, and what we have we don't appreciate. Have you made up your mind what occupation you would like to follow?"

"N-no, not exactly; I have scarcely had time yet, but I suppose I shall have to teach, or else be a companion, or secretary, or something like that. Uncle John says he has promised Martha that I shall not stay here more than a week."

Mr. Locke whistled softly, and the expression of disgust deepened on his face. Ruth went on, speaking fast, and a little nervously.

"The great trouble is that I don't know how to begin to look for a situation of any kind. You see, I have no friends in New York; I have been away so many years, and even when I was a little girl I cannot seem to remember many people who ever came here."

"Campbell was never very fond of visitors,"



Mr. Locke remarked rather grimly. "Entertaining costs money, you know. But surely you must have some acquaintances in New York."

"Mrs. Trafford, a friend of Miss Molton's, lives here. I never met her until two days ago, but we came on in the train together, and she was very kind. She asked me to come and see her."

The lawyer looked relieved.

"Better avail yourself of the invitation as soon as possible, I should say. A woman can always advise another woman much better than a man can do. By Jove, I wish I had a home of my own to take you to, but a boarding-house isn't the pleasantest place in the world, and I'm afraid my landlady hasn't a vacant room. So much for being a crotchety old bachelor, with no near relations. There's Arthur, but I hardly know,—you remember your half-brother, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed; oh, Mr. Locke, can you tell me anything about Arthur? I have been so anxious to hear, but I was afraid to ask Uncle John, for fear he might be angry."

"Just as well you were; you wouldn't have received a very satisfactory answer, I'm afraid; Arthur's all right, but he's been in your uncle's black books for some years past."

"Yes, I know they quarrelled; it was just before I went to school, and Arthur left home."

"Did you never hear what the quarrel was about?" Mr. Locke inquired somewhat curiously.

"No, never; I suppose I was too young to be told."

"Well, I'll tell you the whole story. Arthur was a good boy, but, like most young folks, he was restless, and he and your uncle never hit it off very well together. When he was seventeen, your uncle took him out of school, and placed him in an office down town. Arthur wanted to go to college, and hated office work. He lost two or three positions through inattention to business, which of course made Campbell furious. I helped patch up several rows, and things drifted along fairly well till Arthur was twenty, but the climax came when he fell in love with Nellie Stuart, and declared his intention of marrying her."

"Marrying," gasped Ruth, "a boy of twenty and without any money of his own!"

"Precisely. He was then earning a salary of eight hundred a year, and Nellie hadn't a penny in the world. She was a good girl, though, and a plucky one, too. Her father died when she was sixteen, and she had been supporting her invalid mother for three years. When Arthur met her, she was stenographer for a lawyer, who was driving her to death with work, and not paying her enough to keep soul and body together. Her mother had just died, and she was practically alone in the world. She was a very pretty girl, and Arthur fell madly in love with her. Arthur has old-fashioned notions; thinks women should be taken care of, and all that sort of thing. I believe he rescued Nellie from a rather unpleasant experience in the street one evening. A half-drunken fool was making himself disagreeable to the girl, and Arthur knocked him down. After that he would hear of nothing but marrying her at once, and taking care of her for the rest of his life."

"It was very noble of him, I am sure," said

Ruth, with sisterly pride, "but I suppose Uncle John objected."

"He did object, most decidedly, and one can scarcely blame him under the circumstances, but the more opposition Arthur met with, the more determined he became, and the end of it all was that he and Nellie walked to church, one morning, and were quietly married. Your uncle promptly turned Arthur out of the house, and refused to hear another word about the whole affair, so Arthur hired a flat up-town and set up housekeeping on eight hundred a year."

"But surely he must be better off now," said Ruth, anxiously; "that was more than eight years ago."

"Well, it has been rather a hard pull for him. Nellie wasn't very strong, and then there were the children. There are six of them now, I believe."

"Six children!" exclaimed Ruth, clasping her hands in dismay. "Fancy Arthur's being the father of six children. To think of my having six little nieces and nephews that I never even heard of. It seems too funny. Where do they live now?"

"They still live in a Harlem flat, not very far from the one to which they moved when they were first married. Arthur works hard from one year's end to another, and Nellie is a trump, but it hasn't been all smooth sailing, I'm afraid. I've offered to help them myself sometimes, when things looked pretty black, but Arthur is as proud as Lucifer, and I never succeeded in persuading him to accept more than a small loan, which he invariably returned within three months."

"I am glad of that," said Ruth, her eyes shining with genuine pleasure; "oh, I am so glad that I can be proud of my brother. I have so often thought of him, but there was no one to tell me anything. Oh, Mr. Locke, you have made me very happy. I was feeling so dreadfully lonely and frightened when you came in, but now I know that I am not alone in the world, after all. I will go to see my brother and his wife this very day. Do you think Arthur will be glad to see me?"

"Arthur would share his last crust with you," said Mr. Locke, gravely, "and so would Nellie, for that matter. As I told you before, your

brother has old-fashioned notions about women. If he knew of the state of affairs, he would simply insist upon supporting you, let the cost be what it might."

"But that would be absurd," declared practical Ruth; "of course I should never allow such a thing. I will tell you what I will do, Mr. Locke. I won't go to see Arthur to-day; I will wait until I have found a good situation, and then perhaps they will let me board with them, and what I earn will help things out a little. I could teach the children, too, and help my sister-in-law in different ways. Oh, I shall be so glad to see them all. It will be so delightful to have a home among my own people."

Ruth's eyes were sparkling; her face was radiant. Her uncle's unkindness was for the moment completely swept from her mind by this rush of new anticipations. Mr. Locke, who had been looking rather grave and worried for the past few moments, also brightened perceptibly.

"Not at all a bad idea," he said in a tone of hearty approval. "I suppose Arthur would be ready to take my head off if he knew I had

given my consent to any such arrangements, but I can't help it. Nellie hasn't been equal to much since the twins came, and she's got more on her shoulders now than would crush most women. You find a good situation, with a fair salary, and then we'll go to see Arthur and Nellie, and give them a grand surprise. But there's the clock striking half-past ten, and it's high time I was at my office. By the way, where does this Mrs. what's-her-name live?"

Ruth mentioned the address Mrs. Trafford had given her.

"Put on your things, and I'll walk around there with you. It isn't far, and you may have some difficulty in finding the way by yourself."

"But I am afraid I shall be detaining you," said Ruth, hesitating.

"Nonsense; I've got time enough to spare for that, and I don't propose to have you getting lost in the streets of New York; I shall have enough to answer for to your brother as it is. Hurry and get ready, and I'll have you at your friend's in fifteen minutes."

Ruth turned to leave the room, but at the door she paused.

"Mr. Locke," she said rather timidly, "I should like to ask you a question. Uncle John spoke this morning as if he were poor; is it true?"

"My dear young lady," returned the lawyer, promptly; "your uncle is at the present moment one of the wealthiest men I know. He was always inclined to be economical, even in his youth, and the habit has increased of late years. That's all."



## CHAPTER III

### LOOKING FOR A SITUATION

**I**T was, as Mr. Locke had said, only a short distance to Mrs. Trafford's, but Ruth enjoyed the little walk very much. It was a glorious winter's day, for one thing, and the old lawyer proved a most entertaining companion. He pointed out almost forgotten landmarks, gave careful instructions as to how to find her way about New York streets, and finally left her at the foot of Mrs. Trafford's steps, with a warm hand-shake, and a promise to see her again very soon.

Mrs. Trafford was at home, the maid said, and Ruth was shown into a handsomely furnished parlor, to wait while her card was taken upstairs. In a few moments Mrs. Trafford herself appeared.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me so soon," Ruth said, rising and flushing rather

nervously as the older woman took her hand. "I really had no intention of troubling you so soon, but —"

"I am not as much surprised as you may suppose," Mrs. Trafford interrupted, smiling, and drawing the girl down on the sofa beside her. "It happens that my brother-in-law has heard a good deal about your uncle, who, it appears, is well known among business men as a rather eccentric person. I hope you have not come to tell me that you are in trouble."

"Oh, no, not in trouble exactly," Ruth hastened to explain. "Things haven't turned out quite as I expected, but I am very happy. I came to ask you if you could give me an idea how to go to work to find a situation." And in a few words — dwelling as lightly as possible on her uncle's treatment, and laying much stress on her own hopes — Ruth told her story.

Mrs. Trafford listened in silence till the girl had finished, and then she said quietly: —

"I will do what I can for you, my dear, but I am afraid I have very little influence, and you must remember that January is a poor

season for finding positions of any kind. What do you think you would prefer to try for?"

"I should like to teach little children," said Ruth, brightly; "I love children, and I really think I could teach. Or I might be a companion to some nice old lady,—read to her, write her letters, and make myself generally useful, you know."

Mrs. Trafford smiled.

"I am afraid all old ladies are not exactly what you would call nice," she said, "but we will hope for the best. I will give you a note to a teachers' agency I know of, and another to the Young Women's Christian Association."

"You are very good," said Ruth, gratefully. "Would you mind giving me the notes this morning? I don't want to waste any more time than I can help, and the sooner I am at work the happier I shall be."

Mrs. Trafford rose promptly.

"I will write them at once," she said. "I wish I could ask you to stay with me, but we are such a big houseful, and my sister is expecting a visitor to-morrow."

Ruth expressed her gratitude, and when Mrs. Trafford had gone away to write her notes, she sat smiling happily to herself, and thinking how very kind people were. Of course she would soon find a delightful situation, and, after all, it might really be pleasanter to feel that she was earning an independent livelihood, rather than living in idleness and luxury on her uncle's bounty. Then there were Arthur and his family to think of.

When Mrs. Trafford returned, she was accompanied by a rather pretty girl of about Ruth's own age. The girl was dressed to go out, and carried a roll of music under her arm.

"This is my niece, Lucy Grant," Mrs. Trafford explained. "She is just starting for her music lesson, and as the teacher lives close to the agency where I am sending you, I thought you might walk together, and Lucy could show you the way."

Ruth looked pleased, and the two girls shook hands.

"You must send me a note this afternoon, to let me know how you get on," Mrs. Trafford said, accompanying her visitor to the front

door, "and be sure to come and see us again very soon. My sister is out this morning, but she will be glad to meet you."

"What a dear your aunt is!" exclaimed Ruth, warmly, as she and her new acquaintance walked down the street together. "I have only known her for two days, and she has been so good to me."

"Oh, Aunt Connie's all right," returned Miss Grant, with a smile. "She has lived with us ever since her husband died seven years ago, and we are all awfully fond of her. She told us about you last evening; how you had been at school for ever so many years, and were coming home to keep house for your uncle."

"I found that my uncle was already supplied with a housekeeper, and didn't need me," said Ruth, trying to laugh. "Consequently, I have decided to be a teacher instead of a housekeeper. I think I shall like teaching."

Lucy's blue eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Do you really?" she inquired rather incredulously. "You must be awfully clever,

then. I'm sure I couldn't teach if my life depended on it. I used to try and help my younger sisters with their lessons sometimes, and, oh, but it was hard work. Since I came out last November, I really haven't had time to even look at a book. Mamma and I spend nearly every afternoon going to teas, and then of course there are lots of dinners and parties as well. It does get a little bit tiresome sometimes, but it's jolly, too, in a way. Do you care about society?"

"I'm afraid I don't know very much about it," said Ruth, laughing this time without any effort. "You see, I have only just left school. I enjoy dancing and meeting pleasant people, if that is what you mean."

"It's too bad you're not coming out," said Lucy, good-naturedly. "You'd be sure to have a good time, but then if you care about studying, and things of that kind, you probably won't object so much. I always hated school, and the day I graduated was the happiest day of my life. My two younger sisters are at 'The Briarley' still, but Gladys comes out next year."

The two girls chatted on pleasantly, and by the time they had reached the door of the teachers' agency, Ruth had decided that her new acquaintance, even if not very clever, was certainly very agreeable. They parted in a friendly manner, and Ruth entered the agency with a light heart.

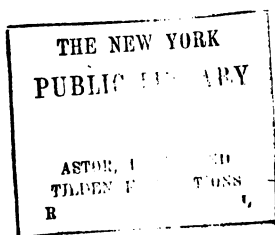
But when the girl came down the steps of that same building twenty minutes later, her heart was not quite so light. She had stated her case to an elderly lady in spectacles, who had asked numerous questions about her attainments, writing her answers down in a book, and finally taking her address and promising to let her know if she heard of any position that would be likely to suit her requirements.

"We really have nothing in view just at present," she added. "January is our dullest season, as by that time all our best teachers are engaged, and our clients are settled for the winter. Of course we may hear of something, and in that case we shall certainly communicate with you, but I think it only right to tell you that the chances are very slight."



"AT LAST HER TURN CAME."





With this very slender hope Ruth was obliged to be content, and having paid her registration fee, and left her uncle's address, she hurried away to the Christian Association, which, thanks to Lucy Grant's directions, she found without much difficulty. Here she was obliged to wait some time before making her wants known, as several women and girls had first to be interviewed. She heard scraps of their conversation while she waited her turn, and, judging from the replies of the lady manager, judged that it must be a dull season for the Christian Association as well as for the agency. At last her turn came. The manager read Mrs. Trafford's note, asked a few questions, and then opened a big book and began glancing over the pages.

"I am very sorry," she said, "for I should be glad to do anything for a friend of Mrs. Trafford, but this is our dullest season, and I doubt very much if I have anything to suit you just now. Possibly in a month or two—"

"Oh, but I can't wait as long as that," interrupted Ruth, in growing dismay. "I must have something to do at once. I am not very par-

ticular; I will be satisfied with anything you can offer."

"All very well, but the question is whether I have anything to offer," said the lady, rather stiffly. "As I said before, this is our dullest season. Here is one lady to whom I might send you, but I scarcely know whether — do you think you would care for the position of companion to an invalid?"

"I should like it very much," said Ruth, her face brightening. "I enjoy reading aloud, and I think I write a fairly good hand. I am almost sure I could give satisfaction as a companion."

The lady manager smiled rather doubtfully.

"Miss Dexter has already had three companions since the autumn," she said. "Her sister was here yesterday, and asked me to send some one else. I told her frankly that I did not think I knew of any one who would care to fill the position, but since you are so anxious to find employment at once —"

"Please let me have the lady's address," put in Ruth, eagerly; "I should like at least to see her."

The manager wrote a few words on a card, and handed it to her.

"You had better leave your address with us," she said kindly, "and if we hear of anything that we think likely to suit you, we will let you know. I hardly think Miss Dexter's place will prove satisfactory, but as you say, you can at least see her."

Ruth thanked her, gave the required address, and hurried home, her spirits once more rising at the hope of possible success. The address on the card the manager had given her appeared to be in the upper part of the city, so she decided to wait until the afternoon before calling on Miss Dexter. Her uncle had said that he would be at home to luncheon, and she feared he might be anxious if she did not appear, or, worse still, Martha's displeasure might be roused if the meal were kept waiting five minutes. So she hastened her steps, and reached her uncle's door at the same moment as Mr. Campbell himself.

"Been out for a walk?" he inquired, regarding her with some curiosity, as he opened the front door with his latch-key.

"I have been looking for a situation," said Ruth, quietly, and then she told him of Mr. Locke's call, and of her subsequent doings. The only subject she did not mention was what Mr. Locke had told her about her brother's family, and her plan for helping them. For the first time since her arrival she half fancied that her uncle looked really pleased.

"You're a sensible girl, after all, I see," he remarked cheerfully. "There's never anything to be gained by wasting time."

As soon as luncheon was over, — it was a rather meagre repast, by the way, consisting of bread and butter, cheese, and baked apples, — Ruth started for her visit to Miss Dexter. Mr. Campbell gave her the required directions, and she left the house with a light heart. A Sixth Avenue electric car landed her within a block of her destination, and she had no difficulty in finding the house she wanted, a small, unpretentious dwelling, on a side street, not far from Central Park.

The door was opened by a maid, who, in answer to Ruth's question, replied that Miss

Dexter was at home, and requested her to wait in the parlor. The parlor was a rather plainly furnished room, and Ruth came to the conclusion that the Dexters could scarcely be very rich. The maid took her card upstairs, and in a few moments a small, faded woman of fifty, with an anxious face and a nervous manner, came into the room.

"You come from the Association, I see," remarked the lady, glancing at the card in her hand.

"Yes," said Ruth. "Is this Miss Dexter?" she added politely.

"I am Miss Marion Dexter; it is my sister who is the invalid. You — you look very young."

"I am eighteen," said Ruth.

"Eighteen is very young; we have never had any one under twenty-five before. I am afraid you may be too — too — what shall I say?"

"Frivolous," suggested Ruth, smiling.

"Well, yes, frivolous. You see, the position is a little difficult in some ways. My poor sister is a nervous invalid. Indeed, her nerves

are completely unstrung. The slightest noise — the mere slamming of a door, for instance — is enough to upset her for days. Her illness is the result of an accident. She was thrown from a carriage several years ago and very badly hurt. She has never recovered from the nervous shock."

"I have not had much experience with invalids," Ruth admitted reluctantly, "but I helped nurse my dear old German teacher through a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism last year, and I am very fond of reading aloud."

Miss Dexter looked doubtful.

"My sister is very particular," she said. "We have had a great deal of trouble this season. It seems almost impossible to find just the right person for the position."

At that moment a bell rang sharply, and Miss Dexter clasped her hands.

"It's my sister's bell," she gasped. "Excuse me." And the little lady hurried out of the room and up the stairs, calling breathlessly:—

"Yes, Kitty, yes, dear, I'm coming."

It was some minutes before Miss Dexter

returned, and then she looked even more worried and nervous than before.

"My sister wishes to see you," she explained. "Will you please come upstairs with me?"

Ruth rose promptly, and followed Miss Dexter to a pleasant room on the second floor, where the invalid received them. She was apparently some years younger than her sister, but worn and thin, and her face, which might otherwise have been pretty, wore an expression of fretful discontent which seemed habitual. She was lying on a sofa drawn close to the fire.

"This is the young lady, Kitty," said the elder sister, rather timidly, pausing in the doorway; "shall she come in?"

"Yes, of course; didn't I say I wanted to see her?"

The invalid spoke in a sharp, querulous voice, and regarded the visitor with evident disapproval.

"She seems a very nice young girl," Miss Marion said in a somewhat deprecating tone, "but she is very young. I was afraid —"

"Never mind what you were afraid of. As



I am the person to have the companion, I prefer to judge of her merits myself."

"Oh, certainly, dear," murmured Miss Dexter, looking decidedly uncomfortable. "I should never dream of interfering, of course, only I hated to give you any unnecessary trouble."

"Well, I rather think I am still capable of looking after my own affairs. Will you sit down, Miss—Miss—I don't think my sister mentioned your name."

"My name is Ruth Campbell," said Ruth, pleasantly.

"Campbell,—that is a Scotch name; are you Scotch?"

"I believe my great-grandfather was, but he came to this country when he was a young man, and his family have lived here ever since."

"Well, I should like to ask you a few questions. Have you ever had any experience in dealing with a nervous invalid before?"

Ruth was obliged to confess that she had not.

"Do you read aloud well?"

"I have read aloud a good deal; I hope I read well."

"I am very particular about my reading; I can't stand having words mispronounced. Do you understand French and German?"

"I think I speak French pretty well, and I have studied German."

"I had one young woman here this winter who told me she was an excellent German scholar. She pronounced Goethe 'Gertie' and Wallenstein 'Wallenstein.' Another woman told me she spoke French with a Parisian accent. She called a fiacre a 'faker' and pronounced poor Marie Antoinette 'Mary Antonetty.'"

Ruth laughed outright. It was such a merry laugh that Miss Dexter smiled, and even the invalid refrained from making a sharp retort.

"It is quite true, I assure you," she went on plaintively, "and as to the way they mangle the simplest English words, it is enough to drive one frantic. Well, I suppose I may as well try you at any rate, so suppose you read to me for a while this afternoon. Give her that novel

off the table, Marion, the one you were reading to me this morning. Now begin there, where my sister shows you."

It was a rather trying ordeal, but Ruth realized the necessity of the case, and, without giving herself time to think, plunged bravely into the middle of the story. When she had read for five minutes, the invalid stopped her by a gesture.

"Your voice is not unpleasant," she remarked patronizingly; "you read too fast, and I don't altogether like your accent, but, on the whole, it is not bad. Suppose you spend the rest of the afternoon with me. My sister is obliged to go down town on an errand, and I don't relish the prospect of being left alone."

"I shall be very glad," said Ruth, readily. She felt immensely relieved that Miss Dexter had not utterly condemned her reading, for she was conscious of the fact that she had not been at her best.

"Very well, take off your hat and jacket, and we will go right on with this book. It ought to be returned to the library to-morrow, and I am anxious to finish it. Hurry and get your

things on, Marion; I will keep Miss Campbell with me till you come back."

"But, Kitty dear, perhaps Miss Campbell's friends may be expecting her at home, or she may have some other engagement," Miss Marion protested feebly.

Ruth hastened to explain that her friends were not expecting her, and that she had no other plans for the afternoon, and Miss Marion, looking somewhat relieved, left the room.

For the next two hours Ruth read steadily, and almost without interruption. It was not particularly interesting to begin in the middle of a story of which she had never heard the beginning, but she did her best to read with expression and real feeling, and Miss Dexter remained so quiet, and made so few objections, that she began to flatter herself with the conviction that she was really getting on very well indeed. It was nearly dark when she closed the book, having finished the last page, and at that very moment Miss Marion appeared, flushed and nervous as usual, and still wearing her hat and gloves.

"I am so sorry to have been so long," she

began breathlessly, "but the stores were so dreadfully crowded it was almost impossible to get waited on, and coming home the cars were blocked. I'm afraid you will have to hurry, Miss Campbell, if you want to get home before dark."

Ruth rose.

"Perhaps I had better go," she said, glancing at the clock. "My uncle dines at six, and I shouldn't like to be late for dinner. Shall I come back to-morrow morning?"

For a moment neither lady spoke. Miss Marion cast an imploring glance at her sister. Miss Kitty moved uneasily on her sofa, and turned her face away from the light.

"I don't think you need trouble to come back," she said languidly. "I find that I don't like your reading as much as I thought I should at first. You have a decidedly Western pronunciation. Then, as my sister says, you are much too young for the position. Marion, I am rather tired; I wish you would tell Rose to bring my tea at once. Good afternoon, Miss Campbell; I am sorry your accent is so unpleasant, for your voice is not bad."

Miss Marion accompanied Ruth downstairs; her face was very red, and she did not meet the girl's honest eyes.

"It—it was very good of you to stay and read to my sister all the afternoon," she stammered, with her hand on the knob of the front door. "I think I ought to offer you some remuneration for your trouble. How much would you —"

"Oh, that's all right," interrupted Ruth, hurriedly; "I am sorry my accent didn't suit your sister, but perhaps the position wouldn't have suited me, either. Good-night."

"Well, of all the queer, disagreeable old maids," soliloquized Ruth, as she hurried down the street. "I don't believe she had the slightest intention of engaging me from the beginning, and only kept me to finish her tiresome old book. Well, it's disappointing, but it's rather funny, too, if I only had some one to laugh over it with me. I haven't had any great success to-day, but there's plenty of time yet; I shall surely have found something before the week is up."

And then she boarded a crowded car, and

went home to eat another poor dinner, and spend another silent evening, trying to read while her uncle dozed, until she went to bed, there to dream pleasant dreams of Arthur and his family, and of the happy, useful future that lay before her.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARJORIE

NOTWITHSTANDING her confident anticipations, Ruth did not find a situation before the week was up. Indeed, there seemed very little likelihood of her finding anything at all to do, and each day the girl's bright hopes grew fainter and fainter. Twice she had called at the agency, three times at the Christian Association, and always with the same discouraging result. Once the manager at the agency thought she had found her a position as nursery governess, but when Ruth arrived at the address given her, it was only to be told at the door that Mrs. Lawrence was already suited. It was Tuesday when she began her quest, and by the following Tuesday she was almost ready to give up in despair.

"I have only one day more," she said to herself, as she stood before the bureau putting the finishing touches to her toilet that morning.



was actually necessary in a place where she was not wanted, and she had determined that if she did not succeed in finding employment of some kind before the end of the stipulated week, she would leave her uncle's home, let the cost to herself be what it might.

And now there was only one more day, and prospects looked very dark indeed.

Her uncle was already at the breakfast table when she entered the dining room, and she fancied that his glance was more keen than usual as he bade her good morning, while Martha favored her with one of her darkest scowls. Ruth could not help an uncomfortable conviction that she had been the subject of conversation between the two, and that Martha was for some reason decidedly out of temper. During the first day or two of her stay, she had tried to propitiate Martha, but the attempt had produced so little result that she had given it up, and now only tried to keep as much out of the old woman's way as possible.

"What are you going to do to-day?" Mr. Campbell inquired as they rose from the table.

He had not spoken during the meal except to wish his niece a curt good morning.

"I am going to the Christian Association this morning," Ruth answered as cheerfully as she could. "I think they may have found something for me by this time. By the way, I wonder if the morning mail has come yet?"

"It's come," responded Martha, to whom this last remark was addressed, "but there's nothing for you in it."

Ruth's heart sank. How eagerly she had watched for every mail during the past week; how often she had been doomed to disappointment!

"I'm going down town early this morning," said Mr. Campbell, "and I shan't be at home to luncheon."

"Very well, Uncle John, I will get my lunch out, too, then, and Martha needn't prepare for either of us. There's a very nice-looking place on the corner where I am sure I can get a sandwich and a glass of milk."

Martha looked slightly mollified, and Mr. Campbell uttered a grunt of satisfaction.

"How's your money holding out?" he in-

quired abruptly, following his niece out into the hall.

"I have a little left," said Ruth, quietly. "You see, I haven't had to spend much since I came to New York. There were my fees at the agency and the Association, but they were not large."

"Well, let me know when it's all gone, but make it last as long as you can. I don't believe in young people being extravagant. Now I must be off. Good-by."

"Good-by, Uncle John."

Ruth hurried upstairs, put her room in order, and then set forth on her discouraging quest.

It was the old story. The manager of the agency had heard of nothing, and at the Association the reply was the same. The elderly lady in spectacles looked rather annoyed at seeing her visitor so soon again, and told her curtly, though civilly, that there really was no use in troubling herself to call so often, as the prospects of finding a situation of any kind before spring were very slight indeed.

"I declare, I have a great mind to go to an intelligence office, and apply for a position as

a servant," said Ruth to herself, as she left the Association, and paused for a moment on the sidewalk, uncertain what to do next. "I can cook and sweep, thanks to dear old madam's instructions, and I love children. I might apply for a situation as nurse. I believe I have heard of such a thing as a lady nurse, but I believe that was in England. They don't have them in this country, I'm afraid."

There really seemed but one sensible course open to her,—to go to her brother without further delay. She shrank instinctively from this step, and yet common sense told her that it was the only wise thing to be done under the circumstances. So after a few moments' deliberation, and a pretty sharp struggle with her pride, she turned her steps resolutely in the direction of the nearest elevated station.

Arrived at Harlem, she had no difficulty in finding her way once more to the dingy apartment house which Mr. Locke had told her was her brother's home. She did not expect to find Arthur at that hour, but she would make herself known to his wife, and perhaps she might be permitted to remain until her brother came home in

the afternoon. Anything would be pleasanter than returning to her uncle's and spending a solitary day with only the sour-faced Martha for a companion. She climbed the steps of the apartment house, and rang the janitor's bell. The door was opened by a young woman with a baby in her arms, who, in answer to her question, informed her that Mrs. Campbell's apartment was the third floor front, and Ruth was soon groping her way up the dark, narrow stairs to the third floor.

Arrived at the top of the third flight, Ruth paused, and having found the door of the front apartment, rang the bell. In less than a minute approaching footsteps were heard, the door was opened, and a little girl of six or seven presented herself. She was rather a pretty child, with large dark eyes, and light curly hair, but it was such an old, solemn little face, that for the moment Ruth was fairly startled.

"Is your mother at home?" she asked, trying to speak pleasantly, though her voice shook a little.

"Muzzie's out," responded the child, fixing

her big solemn eyes on the visitor's face; "she's gone to look for a girl."

"May I come in and wait for her? I want to see her very much."

"Yes, only please don't talk loud, 'cause the twins are asleep, and I don't want them to wake up till Muzzie comes back."

Ruth promised that she would be very quiet, and the child led the way through a tiny hall to a small, plainly furnished room, which evidently did duty as parlor, nursery, and general sitting room for the family. Although the furniture was of the simplest and cheapest, there was an air of refinement about the place, which Ruth noticed at once, and the scrupulous neatness of everything prejudiced her decidedly in her sister-in-law's favor.

"Won't you sit down?" said the small hostess politely, drawing forward the most comfortable chair in the room. "I guess Muzzie'll be back pretty soon. She doesn't like to leave the twins, but she really couldn't help it; you see, she had to look for a girl."

"But surely there is some older person here," exclaimed Ruth, glancing about her in growing

dismay. "You don't mean that you little children are left all alone by yourselves?"

The child smiled with an air of superior wisdom.

"Oh, yes, we are," she announced, not without some pride. "Muzzie took Bobby and Frank, 'cause they get into such dreadful mischief sometimes, but I'm taking care of the twins."

"And how old are you?"

"I'm seven. Bobby's five, and Frank's nearly four. The twins are ten months. Maud would be two and a half, only she went to heaven last summer. That's her picture," — pointing to a framed photograph on the mantelpiece. "It was so fortunate we had her picture taken, 'cause now we can look at her all the time, and when the twins get older we can tell them about her."

"Suppose you come and sit on my lap," said Ruth; "I love little girls, and I should like to talk to you very much."

The child looked pleased.

"I'm afraid I'm rather big to sit on laps," she said a little doubtfully, "but I will if you want

me to. Just wait one minute till I see if the twins are all right."

She stole softly out of the room, and came tiptoeing back in a moment, with her finger on her lip.

"They're just as sound asleep as they can be," she announced in a satisfied whisper. "You see, it's pretty bad if one of them wakes, for he's sure to cry, and that wakes the other one, and then he cries, too. It's pretty hard to take care of two babies at once, especially when they're both crying."

"I should think it might be rather difficult," said Ruth, laughing, and lifting the little thing into her lap as she spoke; "but you haven't told me your name yet."

"Oh, I'm Marjorie, and the twins are Archie and Cecil. I'm the only girl except Maud, and she's in heaven, you know. Are you sure I'm not too heavy?"

"Too heavy? Why, you're as light as a feather. What makes you so thin, dear?"

"I don't know, I suppose it's 'cause I don't eat very much. Maud was a great deal thinner than I am. You see, it was her teeth. The



doctor said she ought to go to the country, but Dada couldn't manage it."

"Why not?" inquired Ruth, almost sharply. Every word the child uttered was making her heart ache more and more.

"Well, you see, the twins cost a good deal of money when they came, and then Muzzie was ill for a long time, and we had to have Mrs. Scott. We liked Mrs. Scott very much, but she was very expensive, Dada said, and so we couldn't go to the country, and Maud went to heaven."

Unconsciously Ruth's arms tightened about the little figure in her lap. Marjorie looked up in surprise.

"I guess you like little girls very much," she remarked in a tone of conviction. "I wish you were going to stay and be our girl, but I suppose you couldn't 'cause you're a young lady."

"You said your mother had gone to look for a servant girl, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I do hope she'll find one. It's very hard, though, 'cause they won't come for fourteen dollars a month, and Dada can't afford to pay any more. We had one last week,

but she only stayed two days. Muzzie's dreadfully afraid she won't be able to find another, and if she doesn't, I don't know what she'll do."

The little old face was actually careworn in its expression now. Ruth had never seen anything so unchildlike in her life, and a mist rose before her eyes. Even Mr. Locke's description had not prepared her for anything like this.

"Muzzie's back does ache dreadfully sometimes," Marjorie went on, "and when Dada comes home, he makes her lie down on the sofa, and then he gets dinner, and puts the children to bed himself. I put myself to bed, of course, 'cause I'm seven, but the others can't. One night Uncle Percy helped Dada cook the dinner, and that was such fun!"

"Who is Uncle Percy?"

"He's really Mr. Percy Allen, but we always call him Uncle Percy, 'cause he's so kind, and we love him so much. He paints pictures, beautiful ones. He took us to see them once, and we had ice cream and cake in his studio. He always makes everybody laugh. Shall I tell you about the time when Bobby was ill and Muzzie tried to make him take cod liver oil?"

Ruth nodded.

“Well, you see, Bobby had a cough that lasted a long time, and the doctor said he must have cod liver oil. Muzzie tried to give it to him in a spoon, but every time she put it in his mouth Bobby would spit it out again. At last he began to kick and scream. Frank always does what Bobby does, so he began to scream, too. That woke the twins, and they both cried, and you can think what a dreadful noise there was. Poor Muzzie was very unhappy, for her back was aching that day, and she was most crying, too, when Uncle Percy came in. When he found out what the matter was, he sat down beside Bobby, and he said, ‘Bobby, what do you suppose I got the worst whipping of my life for?’ Bobby said he didn’t know, and then Uncle Percy said, ‘For drinking up a whole bottle of cod liver oil.’ Then everybody laughed except the twins,—they couldn’t understand, you know,—and Bobby said, ‘Why, is it really good, like candy and ice cream?’ and Uncle Percy said, ‘Just try it and see.’ Then Bobby sat right up, and asked Muzzie to give him the spoon again,

and when she did he swallowed every bit of the cod liver oil, and smacked his lips after it, the same as he does after ice cream. After that he used to ask Muzzie for it all the time, and she had to keep it locked up for fear he would take more of it than was good for him."

"Uncle Percy was a wise man that time," said Ruth, laughing.

"He's a very wise man all the time," corrected Marjorie. "He's the nicest man in the world 'cept Dada. He most always sends ice cream when he's coming to dinner, and he never forgets birthdays."

"But he isn't really your uncle, is he?"

"Oh, no, he's only Dada's friend. We haven't got any real uncles, but Uncle Percy's just as good."

"Haven't you any aunties, either?" Ruth inquired with interest.

"No, we haven't anybody at all 'cept Muzzie and Dada. Mrs. Richards is a very nice lady. She lives in the back, and sometimes we go to spend the afternoon with her, 'cause she likes children. Muzzie thinks she would look after the twins if there should happen to be a

fire when we were all alone, but I think I could do it all right. You see, I know how to go down the fire-escape, and I could carry one at a time."

Ruth shuddered, and drew the child a little closer.

"Your mother doesn't often leave you alone, does she?" she inquired with a catch in her voice.

"Oh, no, she never does if she can help it. We always have a girl when we can get one, but Muzzie says wages have gone up so, she's dreadfully afraid we won't be able to find one any more for fourteen dollars a month."

"Marjorie," said Ruth, rising abruptly, and setting the child on her feet, "I am not going to wait any longer for your mother. I will come back by and by, but I must see a friend first."

Marjorie looked disappointed.

"I wish you would stay," she said regretfully, "I guess Muzzie'll be back soon."

But Ruth was obdurate. She had grown suddenly very anxious to be gone, and her one fear was lest Marjorie's mother should arrive

before she could succeed in making her escape. She kissed Marjorie hurriedly, and had already reached the door when the child came running after her.

"Please take a piece of my candy," she said, holding out a small box of chocolates to the visitor. "They're very nice; Uncle Percy gave them to me for my birthday."

Ruth accepted a chocolate, gave Marjorie another kiss, and next moment was hurrying down the stairs.

Once in the street she lost no time in making her way to the elevated station, where she boarded a down-town train, and was soon speeding rapidly toward the centre of the great city.

"If I can only find him," she said to herself, "and make him listen to my plan. He probably won't be at his boarding-house at this hour, but perhaps I can get his down-town address. Oh, he must help me! It came to me like an inspiration; I feel sure it is the right thing to do, but shall I be able to make Mr. Locke consent?"

## CHAPTER V

### RUTH UNFOLDS HER GRAND SCHEME

“CAN you give me the address of Mr. Locke’s down-town office?”

Ruth put the question rather breathlessly to the maid who had opened the door of the boarding-house where Mr. Locke had his room.

“Mr. Locke is at home to-day. He’s been in the house for several days with a bad cold. I don’t know whether he’ll see any one or not.”

“Oh, he will see me, I am sure he will. Tell him that it is Miss Ruth Campbell, and that I have called on important business.”

“Very well, miss, will you please walk in?”

The maid led the way to a large, rather dreary-looking parlor, where Ruth was requested to wait while her message was taken upstairs. In a few moments the woman returned.

"Mr. Locke will be right down ; he's feeling much better to-day."

Ruth heaved a sigh of relief, and a moment later the lawyer himself came into the room.

"My dear child," he began anxiously, hurrying forward to take the girl's outstretched hand, "this is a great surprise. I hope there is nothing wrong."

"Oh, no," said Ruth, smiling; "there is nothing wrong, only I have found a situation at last, and—I want you to help me, Mr. Locke."

"Want me to help you? Well, to be sure I will. Sit down, and tell me all about it." Mr. Locke was looking decidedly relieved; his first impression was that Ruth had probably been summarily turned out of her uncle's house. "Is it a letter of recommendation that you want?"

"Yes, that is just it," said Ruth, "I want you to recommend me. Mr. Locke, did you ever hear of a lady help?"

"Can't say that I ever did, but I suppose it's all right if you say so."

"Well, there are such things, I know, for I have read about them, and that is what I



want to be. There's no use in my wasting any more time looking for a position as teacher or companion, because they're not to be had at this season. I can cook and sweep; I can even wash and iron. You needn't laugh; I really can. You see, old Madam Molton—Miss Molton's mother—is German, and she doesn't at all approve of the way young ladies are brought up in America. I think she was rather fond of me, so in the summer holidays when I stayed at school, she used to teach me the things she had learned herself when she was a girl. I'm not a bad cook, I assure you, and I think I can say without bragging that I know more about housekeeping than most American girls do."

"But, my dear child, this is nonsense; you surely don't intend to apply for a position as maid of all work."

"That is just what I intend doing," said Ruth, quietly. "Listen to my story, Mr. Locke, and please don't look so shocked. When I got up this morning I was just about as near being discouraged as any one could be. This is the last day of the week, you know, and

not a single thing has turned up. I decided that there was only one thing left for me to do, go straight to my brother, tell him everything, and ask him to take me in."

"I was afraid it would have to come to that," Mr. Locke said, moving uneasily in his chair.

"I hated to do it, oh, how I hated it!" Ruth went on, the color deepening in her cheeks, "but it seemed the right thing to do. Well, I have been to Arthur's home. He and his wife were out, but I saw their little girl. Oh, Mr. Locke, she is such a poor, old-fashioned, precocious little child. She told me her mother had gone out to try and find a maid of all work who will come to them for fourteen dollars a month. They cannot afford to pay more than that, and wages have gone up so much lately, that they are afraid they cannot get any one. You told me yourself that Arthur's wife is not strong. While the child was talking, the thought came to me. It was so sudden it seemed like an inspiration. Mr. Locke, I am going to be my brother's maid of all work."

Mr. Locke laughed outright.

"My dear young lady, do you imagine for

one moment that either Arthur or his wife would consent to such an arrangement? If you go to stay with them, you may prove a great help, for it is true enough that poor little Nellie has a terribly heavy burden on her shoulders; but to take the position of a servant in your brother's family, — the idea is simply absurd!"

"Now, listen, Mr. Locke, and please don't make up your mind to disapprove until I have explained everything. I knew you would object at first, but I want you to hear my plan. Of course Arthur will never consent if he knows who I am, and that is why I have come to you to help me. I have thought it all out, and it really seems quite simple. All I want you to do is to write a note introducing me to my sister-in-law as a young girl in whom you are interested. You can call me by any name you happen to think of. I am an orphan, and quite alone in the world. I have been educated by an uncle, but I am now obliged to support myself. I have been trying to find a position, but have failed, and now all I want is to find a home, where I can work for my board until spring. I have been taught all kinds of house-

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work by an old German lady, and you are very anxious to find a home for me with people you know, and who will be kind to me."

Mr. Locke leaned back in his chair, his face the picture of amused consternation.

"Well, of all the crazy, romantic schemes I have ever heard of," he began slowly, "if this is not the craziest. And pray, when the truth has at last come out, how am I to explain matters to your brother? I don't suppose you intend to carry on the farce for the remainder of your life."

"Why, no, of course not," said Ruth, her bright face clouding a little, "but do you really think Arthur will be angry when he knows why I did it? Oh, Mr. Locke, please don't say it's impossible. I have been so happy over the idea, and it did seem such a splendid solution of all my difficulties. The week will be up to-morrow, and nothing shall induce me to stay at Uncle John's one day longer. If I go to Arthur and tell him the truth, I shall have to confess what a miserable failure I have made of things. Even if I were able to be of some use to him and his family, they couldn't help

feeling that I was a burden, and they would always be afraid I was doing too much. It would be dreadfully uncomfortable all around, I know it would. But if I could go to them on a regular business basis, and feel that I was honestly earning my board, it would be so different. Oh, there can't surely be anything really wrong in it."

"Suppose Arthur recognizes you?"

"He can't. He hasn't seen me since I was nine. You said yourself that you wouldn't have known me if we had met in the street."

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practise to deceive,"

quoted Mr. Locke, smiling. "I never gave my sanction to a lie yet, and I don't want to begin now at my time of life. A deception is a deception, be the cause ever so innocent."

Poor Ruth! Those last words were a little too much for her overwrought nerves. She had been living in a state of nervous excitement for the past week, and the events of the morning had tried her greatly. She had come to the lawyer so full of hope, so sure of success, and

now — she put up both hands before her face and burst into tears.

Now, to see a woman cry was the one thing that the kind-hearted old lawyer could not endure. In another moment he had drawn Ruth's hands down from her quivering face, and his own eyes were rather misty as he said pleadingly:—

“There, there, little girl, don't cry, don't, now. Just dry your eyes, and we'll talk it all over. It was a good, brave plan, I swear it was, and perhaps I'm not quite such a hard-hearted old fellow, after all, as you think me.”

They did talk it all over, and the result of that conversation was that Mr. Locke took Ruth upstairs to his sitting room, and there wrote a letter, which, judging by the expression of her face, afforded that young lady much satisfaction. It is true that Mr. Locke did the actual writing of that letter, but Ruth was looking over his shoulder most of the time, and, whenever his pen paused for a moment, was ready with some fresh suggestion, so that by the time the letter was finished an intimate friend of both might have been more inclined

to attribute the composition to Ruth herself than to the shrewd, practical old lawyer. After that Mr. Locke insisted on Ruth's remaining to luncheon, where the sight of a pretty girl in company with the solitary old bachelor, who never before in the memory of any of the boarders had been known to have a lady visitor, afforded ample food for conversation and conjecture during the next week.

"Good-by, dear, dear Mr. Locke," exclaimed the girl, warmly, as she fastened her jacket, and turned to say a last word to the kind old lawyer; "I can never, never thank you enough for what you have done for me!"

Mr. Locke smiled rather grimly.

"I hope your opinion of me may not have changed before three days are up," he said dryly. "You may be differently constituted from most people, but I can't say that the situation of maid of all work in a large family strikes me as a particularly enviable one."

"Lady help you mean," laughed Ruth, "and that is quite a different thing from a maid of all work. Besides, think of the circumstances. No, I am quite sure I shall never regret what I

have done, and you won't regret it, either, for I shall not let you."

"Well, they say there's no fool like an old fool," the lawyer said to himself, as he stood in the window and watched the girlish figure disappear down the street. "If any one had told me this morning that I would ever lend my assistance to such a crazy piece of nonsense, I simply shouldn't have believed it. But that little girl, — well, she is a fine girl, there's no doubt about that, and, after all, there's a good deal of truth in what she says. If Arthur knew the truth, he'd share his last crust with her; but he couldn't help feeling that she was an added burden, whereas, as matters are now — by Jove, it was a clever idea of that child's, and if any trouble comes of it, why, I shall have to take the consequences, that's all."

It was still early in the afternoon when, for the second time that day, Ruth climbed the stairs of the Harlem apartment house, and rang the door-bell of the third floor front. Again it was Marjorie who opened the door, and this time the solemn, pale little face was brightened by a smile of recognition.



"Muzzie's in now," she announced, holding the door open for the visitor to enter. "I told her how you came to see her, and she can't think who you can be."

"Tell me, Marjorie," said Ruth, anxiously, "did your mother succeed in finding a girl?"

The smile faded from the child's face, and she shook her head mournfully.

"No, she didn't," she said in a tone of regret, "and the lady at the office told her it wasn't any use to try. They won't come for fourteen dollars any more."

"May I see your mother now?"

Marjorie led the way to the sitting room, no longer empty as in the morning, but literally overflowing with children. Ruth could scarcely believe that the small, fragile young woman, sitting in the rocking chair with a baby on each knee, could really be the sister-in-law of whom she had heard. It seemed impossible that that delicate, girlish creature could possibly be the mother of six children. Marjorie's words, however, quickly settled the question.

"Here's the lady, Muzzie, the pretty young lady what was here this morning."

Mrs. Campbell greeted the visitor with a pleasant smile. She was very pretty, and must have been beautiful once, Ruth thought, and she no longer wondered at her brother's infatuation.

"My little girl told me you had called this morning," she said in a sweet, refined voice. "Won't you sit down? You will excuse my not rising, as I have a lapful of babies. Marjorie, darling, give the young lady a chair."

Every chair in the room appeared to be full, but Marjorie hastily removed a doll and a box of blocks from one, and brought it forward for the visitor.

"We are having a little party this afternoon," Mrs. Campbell explained. "Things are not always in quite so much confusion, I am happy to say."

"Oh, these are not all your children, then," and Ruth was conscious of a sensation of decided relief. She had not stopped to count the children, but in that small space they appeared to be legion.

Mrs. Campbell laughed.

"Not quite all," she said; "four of them are

visitors. Those two little boys are mine, and these babies. Marjorie you have seen before."

"You see, it was Rosalie's birthday," added Marjorie, by way of explanation. "We were going to have the party at her house, but her father was ill, and she was afraid there couldn't be any party at all. Then Muzzie said we could have it here, so they all came."

"What dear babies," remarked Ruth, feeling that she must say something complimentary about her two little nephews; "but how can you possibly tell them apart? They look just alike, don't they?"

"Archie has a blue bow, and Cecil has a red one," returned her sister-in-law, smiling. "I can always tell them apart, but no one else can, not even their father."

"I have brought a note from Mr. Locke," said Ruth, feeling that it was time to offer some explanation of her visit.

"Mr. William Locke, the lawyer, you mean?" Mrs. Campbell was evidently surprised.

"Yes, he is an old friend of mine, and has been very kind to me. Will you please read his note? I will hold the babies."

"Oh, no, thank you; I can manage nicely; I am used to it, you see. Now, Archie, my pet, don't pull your brother's hair. It's naughty, you know, and he doesn't like it."

The twin thus gently admonished responded with a crow of delight, and Mrs. Campbell proceeded to read her letter, despite the presence of the two kicking mites in her lap. The other children were absorbed in a game of hide the handkerchief, with the exception of the solemn Marjorie, who stood regarding her mother with grave interest.

As she read, Mrs. Campbell's expression changed several times. First it was curious, then puzzled, then astonished. When she had finished the letter, she looked at Ruth long and earnestly.

"We will go into my room," she said, rising, and gathering a twin under each arm. "We can't talk here. Marjorie, dear, watch the children till mother comes back."

She led the way across the hall to a small bedroom, where, having deposited the twins safely on the floor, she offered Ruth the only chair the room contained, and sat down on the

edge of the bed, still holding the lawyer's letter in her hand.

"This is a rather singular request, Miss — Miss —"

"Barry," said Ruth, promptly, "Ruth Barry."

"Miss Barry. Mr. Locke tells me that you are looking for a place where you can work for your board for a time, until you are able to procure a better position."

"Yes," said Ruth, eagerly, "that is just it. Mr. Locke told me about you. He thought you might be willing to give me a trial."

"Mr. Locke says you have been educated at a Western school, and have very few friends in New York."

"I have no friends at all here," said Ruth, "that is, there is no one I like to trouble with my affairs. I have been trying very hard to find a position of some kind. I thought I might teach or be a companion, but every one tells me this is a dull season, and I haven't succeeded in finding anything at all. I was almost in despair this morning, and then all at once I remembered that I had heard of girls working for their board, and being what peo-

ple call a lady help. I went to Mr. Locke, and he told me about you. When your little girl told me just now that you had not found a servant to suit you, I thought — I hoped — ”

Mrs. Campbell smiled incredulously.

“My dear child,” she said kindly, “you don’t realize what you are proposing. You are a well-educated girl — a lady. I am looking for a maid of all work.”

“I know that,” said Ruth, the tears starting to her eyes; “I know I am horribly unfitted for the position, but I am really not quite so ignorant as you think. I have had good training in all kinds of housework, and indeed, indeed, I will work hard, and do my best to please you if you will only let me try.”

Mrs. Campbell was touched by the girl’s evident distress.

“I am sure you would do your best,” she said, “but I don’t think you realize what taking such a position would involve. We live very simply; we cannot afford many luxuries. The life would be different from anything you have ever known. You would tire of it in a week.”

“Only try me, and see if I tire of it,” cried

Ruth, earnestly. "Mrs. Campbell," she added, her voice trembling a little, "I have been very lonely since I left school. I have longed so terribly for a home and for friends. You are good, kind people, I know, for Mr. Locke has told me about you, and I only ask you to try me for a week. If you don't find me satisfactory, you can send me away again."

Mrs. Campbell wavered. In her heart she secretly considered the scheme every bit as quixotic as Mr. Locke had done. What could a girl fresh from boarding-school know about housework? But she was a very kind-hearted little woman, and it was easy to see the girl was desperately in earnest. After all, there were many worse fates for a young, unprotected girl, alone in a great city, than that of becoming a maid of all work, or lady help, as Miss Barry called it.

"I scarcely know what my husband will say to the arrangement," she said slowly. "We have never thought of taking a boarder, and our accommodations are very limited. The only room I can give you is the little one off the kitchen, where the servant generally sleeps.

Of course we would do all we could to make you happy and comfortable, and it would certainly be a great comfort to have a lady to help me instead of an ignorant Irish girl."

"Then you will let me try," Ruth broke in impetuously. "Oh, dear Mrs. Campbell, if you only will, I shall be so very happy, and I am quite, quite sure you will never be sorry."

When Mr. Campbell reached home that afternoon, he found his niece waiting for him in the library.

"Well, Uncle John," she began brightly, as her uncle took his usual seat in the arm-chair by the fire, "you are not going to be bothered with me any longer. I have found a situation, and I am going to leave you to-morrow."

"Found a situation, eh?" Mr. Campbell was undoubtedly relieved. "And where is it, pray?"

"With some friends of Mr. Locke's. They are young married people, and have several little children. I am to look after the children, and make myself generally useful. I have seen the lady, and I think I shall like the place very much."



"If they are friends of Locke's I suppose it's all right, though I must say I didn't expect Locke to put his finger in the pie. He seemed rather inclined to give me a piece of his mind the other night. Well, I can't say it won't be a relief to me to know you're comfortably provided for. I find Martha is getting decidedly cranky, and if you hadn't found something soon, I'm inclined to think that I should have lost her. It would have been a serious loss, too. Martha has her faults, but I'm used to her, and she's very economical."

"Well, I shall not trouble either you or Martha after to-morrow," said Ruth, proudly. "I am sorry I couldn't have been more of a comfort to you, Uncle John, but as things are I had much better leave you."

"Yes, yes, much better. I'm not accustomed to young people about the house, you see, and the fact is, I don't know what to do with them. I'll give you fifty dollars when you leave to-morrow, and if you're ever in need of a little help, why, you can let me know. I'm not a rich man, though, remember that, and whatever other lessons you may learn in life,

don't learn to be extravagant. Extravagance was the curse of your father's life. He died a pauper at forty-five, and if it hadn't been for my saving and scraping together a few dollars, I wonder where you'd be to-day."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LADY HELP

“**M**ISS BARRY, I think you are a much prettier person than Bridget.”

Bobby Campbell stood in the middle of the kitchen, his small hands thrust into his trousers pockets, his chubby face the picture of earnest consideration. For fully five minutes he had been silently and persistently staring at Ruth, who, arrayed in a long checked apron, was busily engaged in beating eggs.

Ruth laughed. She had only known Bobby for five hours, but she had already decided that he was an interesting character.

“Who was Bridget?” she inquired with interest.

“She was the lady that used to do our work. She was very pretty, especially on her Sunday out, but she wasn’t as pretty as you.”

“Was she good to you,—did you like her?”

“Ye-es, pretty well. She used to wear a

beautiful hat with red flowers on her Sunday out, and Joe said she was a beauty, but Bridget said, 'Oh, get along wid yez.' Bridget was an Irish lady; are you Irish?"

"No, I am an American."

"Just like us, we're Americans. I suppose that's why you take your meals in the dining room. Bridget used to eat in the kitchen, and sometimes on her Sundays in, Joe came to tea with her. Bridget's name was Miss Flynn, and Joe's was Mr. Mulligan. Bridget's going to be Mrs. Mulligan some day, Joe says."

"Why did Bridget go away?" Ruth asked.

"I think it was 'cause she taught us to deceive, the day Maud went to heaven."

"Taught you to deceive," repeated Ruth, looking puzzled.

"Yes; you see it was this way. Muzzie and Dada and Uncle Percy, and I think some other people, all went to take Maud to heaven. Maud was in a lovely white box, all covered with flowers, and they took her in a carriage. I don't know how they got up to heaven, but Marjorie says she s'poses it was in an air-ship. We asked Muzzie, but she cried, and Dada

said we mustn't talk about it. Well, when they were all gone, Joe came to see Bridget, and they went out together. She went to get some flowers for her hat, and she wanted Joe to help her choose them, 'cause the hat was to wear to Ellen Murphy's wedding. We never saw Ellen Murphy, but she was a great friend of Bridget's. She told us to be good while she was out, and we said we would. First we played funeral, 'cause Maud had a funeral, you know, and then we played house. I was the doctor, and Marjorie and Frank were the father and mother, and the twins were their babies. We played the babies were ill, and I came to give them some medicine. I found a bottle with some of the kind in it that Maud had when she was ill, and I tried to make Cecil swallow it, but he wouldn't, and it all ran down his neck and over his dress. And then Bridget came back, and took the bottle away. She was awful cross at first, but afterwards she got kind. She said if we'd promise not to tell Muzzie she'd been out, she'd buy us some lovely candy the next time she went to the corner. Me and Frank promised, but Marjorie wouldn't,

and then Bridget slapped her, and that made us all very angry. So when Muzzie and Dada came home after they'd left Maud in heaven, we told them all about it, and after that Bridget went away. We've had some other girls, but none of them were at all pretty."

Bobby relapsed into silence, and Ruth went on with her work. At the end of about three minutes the small boy broke out again.

"Say, Miss Barry, I want to ask something. Do you ever whip people?"

"No, never," said Ruth, with decision. "I don't believe in treating little children as if they were animals. I reason with them, and try to have them do right because they love me, and don't want to make me unhappy. Don't you think that is the best way?"

"Yes, I do," said Bobby, in a tone of deep conviction. "Muzzie reasons, but sometimes Dada spansks. It makes Muzzie very sad when we are naughty. Miss Barry, if I tell you something, will you promise you won't tell anybody?"

"I can't promise till I know what it is, but I won't tell if I can help it."

"It's about the milk," said Bobby, with a deep sigh; "it's all gone. Me and Frank spilled it, and Muzzie doesn't know."

Ruth laid down her egg-beater, and lifted her little nephew into her lap.

"Tell me all about it," she said kindly.

"Well," said Bobby, "it was after lunch, the time you was helping Muzzie cut out Marjorie's new dress. Me and Frank was thirsty, and we went to get a drink. Muzzie says we mustn't touch the milk 'cept for breakfast and supper, 'cause she wants it for the twins' bottles, but we thought if we took a little bit maybe she wouldn't know, and we don't like water very much, 'specially when it hasn't got any ice in it. First I took just a tiny little swallow out of the pitcher, and then Frank took one, but he drank too much. I told him he did, but he said he didn't, so I tried to pull the pitcher away. Then he pulled the other way, and—I don't know how it happened, but the pitcher tipped over, and all the milk was spilled on the floor. We wiped it up very nicely; I think Muzzie would be pleased about that. I couldn't find a towel,

so I wiped it up with one of Muzzie's aprons, and Frank wiped with a piece of muslin he found. We hid the things under our bed. The twins had just had their bottles, so Muzzie didn't have to go to the refrigerator again before she went out, but when she comes home she'll go, and then she'll find all the milk gone."

Bobby paused, and regarded his new acquaintance with solemn eyes. Ruth found some difficulty in looking as grave as she deemed proper under the circumstances.

"It was very naughty to touch the milk when your mother had forbidden it," she said slowly. "Now what do you think will happen when your poor little brothers come home hungry, and there is no milk to give them?"

Bobby's lip quivered. He was only five, and not a very hardened sinner, after all.

"I've been thinking about that," he said with a gulp. "They're always hungry when they come home from the park, and Muzzie gets them their bottles right away. I s'pose somebody will have to go out and get more milk."



"Bobby," said Ruth, on whom a sudden light was breaking, "was it because you wanted to tell me this that you refused to go out with your mother and the other children?"

Bobby drooped his eyes.

"Yes," he said meekly; "I said my feet was tired, but they wasn't, not very, I mean. You're so very pretty, I thought perhaps you'd go out and get some more milk before Muzzie comes home, and then she won't have to be unhappy."

Ruth laughed in spite of herself.

"Don't you think your mother might consider that teaching you to deceive?"

Bobby reddened, and shifted his position uneasily.

"I guess I'll tell her to-night when I say my prayers," he said softly. "I generally do tell her things when I say my prayers, but, you see, she won't be quite so unhappy then, 'cause the twins will have had their bottles all right, and then Dada won't have to know."

"Don't you like to have your father know about things?" Ruth asked with interest. She could not quite picture her kind-hearted,

she tried to keep pace with Bobby, — who appeared to think there was no time to lose, — what Miss Molton and the girls would say if they could see her in her present occupation.

“I suppose some of the girls would be rather shocked,” she said to herself with a smile. “Madam wouldn’t, though; she would approve, I know. Dear old Madam, what should I be doing now if it were not for her lessons? Oh, I do hope I shall be able to cook my first dinner really well. I know my sister-in-law hasn’t a particle of faith in my powers, and I want to show her that she is mistaken.”

It was a very blustery afternoon, and as they turned the corner, and faced a row of empty lots, a gust of wind carried away Bobby’s cap, much to that young gentleman’s amusement. The cap was soon recovered, and having procured the milk at the dairy, which Bobby pointed out as “the place where Muzzie always gets it,” they turned their steps toward home. Just as they left the dairy, however, Bobby caught sight of a couple of friends, who were

amusing themselves by sliding on a small piece of ice in one of the empty lots, and with a hurried assurance to his companion "that he would be right straight back," he darted away for "just one little slide." Ruth stood still for a moment, uncertain whether to wait or to go on alone, and just then another gust of wind swept around the corner, nearly taking her off her feet, and away went her hat, regardless of the pins, which she had felt sure would hold it in place.

With an exclamation of dismay, the girl started in pursuit, but she had not taken many steps when she saw, to her relief, that the truant had already been captured by a tall young man, who was hastening toward her with her lost property in his hand.

"Oh, thank you very much," said Ruth, as the stranger held out her hat to her with a gleam of amusement in his pleasant gray eyes.

She was about to set down her pitcher on the sidewalk, when the young man interposed.

"Let me hold your pitcher for you while you put on your hat," he said politely, and Ruth thought that his voice was as pleasant as his

eyes. Indeed, he was a decidedly attractive-looking young man. He had a strong, clever face, and he was unmistakably a gentleman.

"Oh, thank you," said Ruth for a second time, and she could not help blushing a little; "I don't like to trouble you."

"No trouble whatever." And before Ruth quite realized what was happening, her pitcher had been transferred from her hands to those of the stranger.

Just at this moment there was a shout from behind, and, greatly to Ruth's astonishment, she saw Bobby, flushed and breathless from his slide, fling himself upon her new acquaintance, shouting rapturously: —

"Uncle Percy, oh, I say, Uncle Percy, are you coming to dinner, and are we going to have ice cream?"

"I am coming to dinner, and we are going to have ice cream, but look here, young man, what does this mean? I thought going out by yourself was one of the few things that were forbidden."

"I'm not out by myself, I'm out with her," returned Bobby, indignantly, pointing to Ruth,

who had by this time secured her hat, and was holding out her hand for the milk pitcher.

"Indeed!" There was genuine astonishment in the young man's gaze. It was evident he had not heard of the expected addition to the Campbell household.

"She's come to live at our house," explained Bobby. "She only came this morning, but I like her. I think she's much prettier than Bridget. We came out to get milk, but, oh, Uncle Percy, please don't tell Muzzie about it. I'm going to tell her when I say my prayers, but I don't want anybody else to tell first."

The young man laughed, but the look of astonishment deepened on his face.

"Some mischief afoot, I conclude," he said, glancing from Bobby to his pretty companion, "but I won't give information. Please allow me to carry this pitcher, Miss — Miss —"

"My name is Barry," said Ruth, quietly. "I have come to stay with Mrs. Campbell for a while, and am to work for my board. An old friend of my family — Mr. William Locke — recommended me. You may have heard the Campbells speak of Mr. Locke."

"Locke, the lawyer? Oh, yes; I have met him several times myself. Rather an odd old chap, but very jolly."

"He has been very kind to me," Ruth said. "I was almost in despair when he sent me to Mrs. Campbell, for I had been trying very hard to find a situation, and was almost at the end of my resources."

"He couldn't have sent you to a better place," said the young man, heartily. "I am a very old friend of the Campbells myself. My name is Allen. Perhaps you may have heard Mrs. Campbell mention me."

Ruth explained that she had heard of Mr. Allen from little Marjorie, and that led to some conversation about the children, which lasted until they had reached the apartment house. Mr. Allen refused to relinquish the milk pitcher till they had mounted the stairs to the Campbells' quarters, and when he did hand it back to Ruth outside the kitchen door, the act was accompanied by such a frank, pleasant smile, that the girl felt sure this was the most agreeable young man she had ever met. Not that her experience of young men was very extensive,

Miss Molton having held old-fashioned ideas on the bringing up of schoolgirls.

When Mrs. Campbell and the children returned from their walk, they found Bobby entertaining the guest in the sitting room; the lady help was nowhere to be seen. As soon as the children's outdoor things had been removed, Mrs. Campbell hurried to the kitchen, where she found Ruth busily engaged in chopping spinach.

"An old friend of ours has come to dinner," she announced rather nervously. "Don't you think you had better let me help you a little?"

Ruth paused, and, with the chopper still in her hand, cast an appealing glance at her sister-in-law.

"Please let me do it alone," she urged. "If you are not satisfied, you can tell me, and I will try to improve; but let me have my own way just this once."

Mrs. Campbell still looked doubtful, but being too kind-hearted to make any further protest, she retired, and Ruth was left mistress of the field.

At half-past six the lady help appeared at the parlor door, to announce that dinner was served. Her cheeks were flushed from recent exertion, but her eyes were sparkling with well-earned triumph, and although her plain brown dress was as simply made as could well be, and she wore no other ornament but a simple gold pin at her neck, she looked, as Percy Allen inwardly remarked, "every inch a lady." Mr. Allen was not the only gentleman present, for seated in the rocker, with Marjorie on one knee and little Frank on the other, was a young man, whom Ruth at once recognized as her half-brother, although, had she chanced to meet him under other circumstances, she might have failed to connect the bright, merry-faced boy she remembered, with the tired, careworn-looking man before her. But the kind, sunny, blue eyes were unchanged, and when Mr. Campbell smiled and held out his hand to her, with some pleasant words of greeting, it was the old smile that she remembered so well, and for a moment she was seized by an almost overmastering desire to declare herself then and there. She checked the impulse, however, and no one but



Mr. Allen noticed that Miss Barry had grown suddenly rather pale.

That dinner was, Ruth afterwards maintained, the greatest success of her life. The mutton was done to a turn, the potatoes were served in a manner hitherto unknown to the Campbell children, and the spinach was, Mrs. Campbell frankly confessed, the most delicious she had ever tasted. The ice cream had arrived, true to Uncle Percy's promise, and the children feasted in silent enjoyment, while their mother's face grew brighter every moment. She had worked so hard for so long; was it possible that better days were in store for her at last, she wondered?

As for the conversation, it was by far the pleasantest Ruth had heard since leaving school. The Campbells and their guest were undoubtedly cultivated people, and they talked on subjects, and seemed to take an interest in things, of which Ruth had hitherto only read in books. Mr. Allen was an artist, and deeply interested in his work, and the others were anxious to hear of his plans and ambitions. Ruth wondered how any woman, with as much

“have you never heard of people accepting positions from necessity, not choice? I confess that when Nellie told me about this girl last night, I was decidedly opposed to the plan. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the fact that dear old Locke is one of the best friends we have in the world, I should have been very much inclined to refuse to give my consent. I went to see the old gentleman this morning, and, I declare, he put the matter in rather a new light. He says he has known this Miss Barry from a child, and that she is as good a girl as ever lived. She has had rather a rough time of it since she left school, — been looking for every sort of position, from teacher to private secretary, and failed to find anything. All she asks of us is to give her a home and her board, and she will do the rest. She has relations, but she's too proud to ask them for help, and after all there are worse positions in the world than that of a lady help as she calls it. My only fear was that she might prove a lady hindrance, but our experience this evening seems to prove the contrary. If she continues to prove a real help, and if I get the position I am

hoping for in the spring, I shall be able to offer her a fair salary, and in that case she may be willing to remain with us permanently."

Mrs. Campbell gave her husband a grateful smile, but the smile was followed by a sigh, as she left the room and went away to put the children to bed. Poor Arthur, he was always so sanguine, so hopeful of a better position in the near future. Even when things had been darkest, he had never quite given up hope.

"Muzzie," observed Bobby, suddenly breaking a long silence, as he sat on the edge of his bed, swinging his bare feet in the air, while his mother undressed sleepy little Frank, "I've got something to tell you when I say my prayers. It's about Miss Barry, and Uncle Percy's a little in it, too. I do think Uncle Percy and Miss Barry are the nicest gentleman and lady I ever knew, and, Muzzie dear, don't you really think Miss Barry is much prettier than Bridget, even on her Sunday out?"

## CHAPTER VII

### NEW EXPERIENCES

**R**UTH had been in her new home for more than three weeks, and she had almost lost sight of the fact that there was anything particularly unusual in her position. Her life was certainly a busy one, but she was far from being unhappy. She did plenty of hard work every day, but there was a great satisfaction in feeling that she did it well, and as she saw the tired, anxious look slowly fading out of her sister-in-law's eyes, she could not feel that she had made a mistake in acting as she had done, let the world say what it might. It was impossible to help loving sweet, gentle Mrs. Campbell; she was so bright and cheerful, so tenderly devoted to her husband and children, and so uncomplaining of her own sufferings, for she was far from strong, that Ruth's warm heart had gone out to her at once, and the two soon became firm friends. The children had each and

all found places in their aunt's affections. Bobby might be mischievous, Frank tiresome, and the twins fretful; they were all darlings in Ruth's estimation, and as for little Marjorie, she loved the child with a love that was half admiration and half pity.

"If I could only drive that old look out of that poor little child's face," she said one day to Percy Allen, "I believe it would make me happier than anything else in the world. When she looks at me as she does sometimes in that solemn, precocious way, I declare it fairly frightens me."

Marjorie was her father's idol, and it was pretty to see the child's devotion to him.

"How was business to-day, Dada?" she would inquire, looking up anxiously into his face when he bent to kiss her on his return every evening. And when he laughed and pinched her cheek, telling her that business was all right, her face would brighten, and she would seem for the time almost childlike. But when one night he came home with a bad headache, and went at once to his room, refusing to eat any dinner, Marjorie was very grave,

and before the rest of the family had finished their meal, she slipped quietly away, to sit in the dark by her father, and stroke his forehead with a tenderness that was almost motherly.

"I was afraid it was business that made Dada's head ache," she explained later to Ruth in a confidential whisper. "Business is very bad sometimes, and he doesn't like to tell Muzzie, 'cause it makes her so unhappy. He had a dreadful headache the time the firm failed. It was very sad then, 'cause it was just after Maud went to heaven, and Muzzie was ill. He told me about it, 'cause he said he had to talk to somebody, and we felt very unhappy; but then Mr. Locke—he's a very kind old gentleman Dada knows—found him some other business, and when it was all right again he told Muzzie, and she cried. But he says it isn't business now, only just a headache, and I'm so very glad."

It was only by stray hints and chance allusions of this kind that Ruth was able to form any idea of the state of the family finances, for neither her brother nor his wife ever mentioned the subject in her presence, and, kind

and genial as they both were, there was a certain dignified reserve about them that effectually prevented any expressions of curiosity on the part of their friends. All the affection that Ruth had felt for the kind, big brother of her childhood had returned, and her heart ached many a night when she lay awake thinking over Arthur's privations, and the little she was able to do to help him. More than once she was on the point of revealing her secret, but some instinct always seemed to hold her back, and a little incident which occurred one evening served to prove to her effectually the impossibility of such a confession.

Arthur came home rather later than usual, looking both flushed and indignant.

"I am sorry to be late for dinner," he explained, "but I was detained in a most unexpected way. I was coming up-town on an elevated train, crowded as they always are at this hour, and a young girl standing close beside me fainted. I happened to recognize her, for she is stenographer for a man I know. She is only seventeen, poor little thing, and she was literally worn out. She had been

working hard all day, had not had time to get any lunch, she told me, and, to cap the climax, was obliged to stand all the way up-town in a crowded train. We got her off at one of the stations, and as soon as she came to, I took her home in a cab. That child's brother has a good position in a bank, and yet he allows her to slave herself to death like that. Such things make a man's blood boil."

"Perhaps the brother has a large family of his own to support," suggested Mrs. Campbell, who always had a charitable excuse for every one.

"And suppose he has, does that make it any more lawful for him to allow a little delicate girl like that to kill herself? It's a man's duty to look after the women of his family. Do you suppose I would allow my sister to work while I had a crust to share with her?"

Ruth's cheeks were tingling, and her heart beat with the pride of this noble sentiment, but she felt it incumbent upon her, nevertheless, to make some protest under the circumstances.

"Perhaps the girl does not wish to be sup-



ported," she suggested; "perhaps she prefers to be independent."

"A girl of that age has no business to be independent," Mr. Campbell maintained with decision. "No girl, in my opinion, is able to take care of herself until she is at least twenty-five, and my only regret is that that girl's brother was out. Nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to have treated him to a piece of my mind."

A warning glance from his wife here brought Mr. Campbell to the sudden recollection of a fact which he had hitherto quite forgotten, that Miss Barry was herself considerably under twenty-five, and was unwilling to be supported by relatives. He paused rather abruptly in his remarks, and hurried away to prepare for dinner. After that Ruth no longer hesitated about the wisdom of keeping her secret.

"In the spring, when I have found a good position, I will tell them everything," she decided. "Then I can pay my board, and that money will pay the wages of a really good maid of all work. Perhaps by that time they will have grown really fond of me, and will

want me to stay even when they know how I have deceived them."

There was very little danger that the Campbells would not grow fond of Ruth. At the end of the first week Mrs. Campbell had written to Mr. Locke a letter literally overflowing with joy and gratitude.

"I don't know how to thank you," she wrote. "Neither Arthur nor I have had so much comfort in years. I am afraid I am not much of a housekeeper, though I have tried very hard to make Arthur and the children comfortable, but Miss Barry acts as if she had kept house from her cradle, and yet she is such a perfect lady, and such a pleasant companion. My only fear is that we may let her do too much. Arthur thinks we ought to pay her something, but when I suggested it to her she seemed really offended, and declared that we were paying her more than enough by merely letting her stay with us. Of course I know it is only a temporary arrangement, and cannot possibly last long, but by spring I hope I shall be stronger, and then perhaps I can manage better, and besides, Miss Barry is teaching me

so many things that I never knew before. You must come to dinner soon, and see for yourself what a famous cook she is."

And so the letter ran on for several pages.

Mr. Locke sent that letter to Ruth, and the girl shed some very happy tears over it in the seclusion of the tiny bedroom that had once been Bridget's. She also received a kind, sympathetic letter from Miss Molton, to whom she had written a full account of what she had done. Miss Molton said that although she did not, as a rule, approve of deception of any kind, still she could not feel that under the circumstances Ruth had made a mistake. She was genuinely fond of the girl, and she sent her plenty of kind, motherly advice, while old Madam added a few kind words, and a recipe for German Leb-Kuchen. Madam was delighted that her useful lessons were likely to prove of such real advantage, and she laughed to scorn her daughter's anxious fears lest "dear Ruth should be doing something a little odd."

When Ruth had been in her new home about a fortnight, she went to see Mrs. Traf-

ford, but learned that that lady had suddenly gone South to nurse an old friend who had been taken ill at St. Augustine. Ruth asked for Miss Grant, but on hearing that she was not at home, she went away, without leaving any address. Her uncle had not asked her to call, so she refrained from doing so, for the present at least.

There was only one person who did not appear thoroughly satisfied with the present state of affairs, and that was the young artist, Mr. Percy Allen. As little Marjorie had said, Uncle Percy was a very frequent visitor, and as Ruth was treated in every respect as a member of the family, it was only natural that he and the lady help should see a good deal of each other. For some reason which he did not explain, Mr. Allen did not approve of Ruth, or at least he did not approve of her present occupation. On the second evening that he dined with the family, Ruth noticed with surprise that when she rose from the table to change the plates, the artist frowned and looked decidedly uncomfortable, and when she passed him the dessert, a pudding of which

she was particularly proud, he looked actually cross.

"Do take some, Percy, it's delicious," urged Mrs. Campbell, innocently. "Miss Barry is a splendid cook."

"I never eat puddings," was the young man's rather sharp answer, and no more was said on the subject.

Ruth was a little hurt. She liked to have her efforts appreciated, and she inwardly decided that Mr. Allen wasn't nearly as nice as she had thought him.

It was the same thing on his next visit. When Ruth opened the door for him, he looked as if something had annoyed him, and although always perfectly kind and courteous in his manner, she felt convinced that for some reason her brother's friend was not altogether pleased with her.

It was a wet afternoon in February, and Ruth and her sister-in-law were sewing together in the parlor. The three elder children had been invited to spend the afternoon with some friends, and Bobby and Frank had gone, but Marjorie, who had a bad cold,

remained at home, and was amusing the twins in the next room.

"I wonder if Percy will be here to-night," Mrs. Campbell remarked somewhat irrelevantly, as she paused in her work for a moment to thread a needle; "he said he was coming some day this week."

"You are all very fond of Mr. Allen, are you not?" said Ruth, in a tone of interest.

"Yes, indeed; he and my husband have been friends for years, and he seems just like one of the family. He is such a good fellow, one could scarcely help being fond of him. He is poor, — most artists are, you know, — but he is very clever, and his friends all feel sure he will make his name in the world. I wish you could see some of his pictures; they are really beautiful, I think. His father is a clergyman in Vermont, and the family are not *very* well off. Percy is the only son, but there *are* several girls, and he is always doing kind *things* for them all. One of his sisters is an *invalid*, and last winter he sent her and his *mother* *over* to Florida, and paid all the expenses *of the* *and* the trip himself."

"I suppose he is very busy," said Ruth.

"Yes, he is in the daytime, but of course he can't paint after dark. He is beginning to be rather well known among artists."

"I should think he would be rather lonely living all by himself," Ruth remarked, for the sake of keeping up the conversation.

"He is lonely sometimes, but it can't be helped. I wish he would fall in love with some nice girl, but the trouble is he can't afford to marry a poor one, and I don't suppose anything would induce him to ask a rich one to marry him."

"Not even if he loved her, and knew that she loved him?" Ruth inquired in surprise.

"Percy is one of the proudest men I have ever met. He would consider it taking a dishonorable advantage of a girl to ask her to marry him if she had money and he had not."

"But I thought when people were in love it didn't matter about money or anything else," said Ruth, innocently. "Of course I don't know anything about it except what I have read in stories," she added, blushing.

Mrs. Campbell laughed.

"You are very romantic, I am afraid," she said. "I don't see myself why such things should make so much difference, and with women I don't think they really do, but with men—well, you see, men are more proud. My husband is just like Percy. I often tell him that I consider it a blessing that I was poor, for if I had had money of my own I am sure he would never have married me. It has been rather a struggle sometimes, but we have worked together, and that is a thousand times better than living in idleness and luxury by one's self."

"If a man cared for me," said Ruth, slowly, "I should want him to love me enough not to care a straw whether I were a pauper or a millionaire."

There was a short pause while they both stitched away in silence; then Mrs. Campbell said anxiously:—

"How Marjorie coughs. I hate that croupy sound; it always makes me nervous. Marjorie darling, are you sure you are warm enough?"

"Yes, Muzzie," came the answer in a hoarse little voice from the next room. "I'm quite



warm, only my throat is just a little bit sore."

"I know a splendid remedy for a cough," exclaimed Ruth, with a sudden inspiration. "Madam used to give it to us at school when we had colds, and we all loved it. It is very simple, only lemon and sugar, with a little sweet oil. I'll go and make some at once." And Ruth sprang to her feet, and began hastily folding up her work.

The new medicine, as the children called it, was a great success, and was enjoyed not only by Marjorie, but by the two little boys as well. Both Bobby and Frank declared, after tasting the first spoonful, that they were quite sure they were getting very sore throats.

Mr. Campbell came home rather early that evening, bringing with him—a most unusual thing—two tickets for the theatre.

"I thought you looked this morning as if you needed a little diversion," he explained, smiling, when his wife ventured a gentle protest against so much extravagance. "I hear 'Sherlock Holmes' is fine, and we have neither of us had a treat in a long time. You

won't mind leaving the chicks with Miss Barry to look after them."

Mrs. Campbell glanced at her black dress, the mourning she was still wearing for little Maud, but she made no further objection, and soon after dinner the husband and wife started for their rare treat, leaving Ruth to take care of the house and the children.

"I am sure I am getting a very bad cough indeed," remarked Bobby, reflectively, as he sat in his favorite attitude on the edge of the bed, kicking his heels in the air. "I guess it's going to hurt pretty awfully to-morrow."

"Little boys who tell stories are sometimes punished," said Ruth, severely. "You know you were perfectly well until you tasted that syrup I made for Marjorie."

"It came on all of a sudden," persisted the incorrigible Bobby, and he made a feeble attempt to imitate Marjorie's cough.

"My froat is sore, too," put in little Frank; "I dot awful toff."

"Well, I will give you each one more spoonful," said Ruth, laughing in spite of herself, "and then you must go right to sleep without

another word. Does your chest hurt much when you cough, Marjorie dear?"

"Just a little bit, but I guess it'll be all right when I have some more medicine. Aren't you glad Muzzie's gone to the theatre, Miss Barry?"

"Very glad; now jump into bed quickly, or you will get more cold."

"I think business must be all right," said Marjorie, with a sigh of content, as she laid her hot little head on the pillow. "Dada wouldn't take Muzzie to the theatre if business was very bad."

When the children were all in bed, and the dinner dishes had been washed and put away, Ruth hesitated. There was plenty of sewing to be done, she knew, there always was in that large family, but somehow she didn't feel quite like sewing that night. She had been working rather hard for the past few weeks, and she was feeling just a little tired. After all she was only eighteen, and there were so many pleasant things in the world that she would like to know more about. The theatre, for instance, was a very interesting place. Her brother and

his wife had gone for an evening's pleasure, and she decided that she was entitled to a little pleasure, too. So, instead of taking up the well-filled mending basket, she went to the book-case, and having selected a novel that looked interesting, settled herself for an hour of solid, uninterrupted enjoyment.

She had not read a dozen pages, however, when there was a ring at the bell, and on going to open the door, she found herself face to face with Mr. Percy Allen.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### RUTH DECIDES

“GOOD evening, Miss Barry,” said the visitor, taking off his overcoat with the air of a person very much at home. “It’s a beastly night out; I’m glad to be indoors for a while at any rate.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Campbell have gone to the theatre,” said Ruth, rather stiffly. If Mr. Allen did not approve of her, she did not want him to feel obliged to come in.

“Gone to the theatre, have they? Well, that’s rather good news. Poor little Nellie doesn’t get much of that sort of thing, nor Campbell either, for that matter. I hope you won’t object to my coming in for a little while.”

There was no refusing this request, of course, so Ruth decided to leave off trying to be stiff, and smiled instead, as she led the way to the parlor.

“You won’t mind if I darn stockings while

we talk, will you?" she remarked cheerfully, drawing the big mending basket from under the sofa. The Campbells' quarters were not large, and every inch of space was consequently utilized.

"I really can't afford to waste any time, you know. The way in which small boys contrive to wear holes in their stockings is truly appalling."

The smile suddenly faded from the visitor's face, and was replaced by an unmistakable frown.

"Are you never idle?" he inquired somewhat impatiently. "I really ask for information."

Ruth laughed.

"I was planning being rather idle just before *you* came in," she said with a glance at the



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"Not in the least," said Ruth, smiling, though she was beginning to feel vaguely uncomfortable.

"Then, would you mind telling me why you are doing this sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing; darning Bobby's stockings?"

"You know what I mean. Why have you, a lady in every sense of the word, accepted the position of a household drudge?"

"A lady help you mean, which is quite a different thing from a household drudge."

"Call it what you like, the work is the same. You know very well you are working like a slave for people who a month ago were complete strangers to you. I realize that it is not always easy or even possible to obtain just the position one would like, but surely there can be no actual necessity for this sort of thing."

Ruth's cheeks were pink, but she was not more than half angry. After all, it was pleasant to feel that some one was taking an interest in her, even if it were only to lecture her.

"There is a decided necessity in the case,"

she said quietly. "I tried hard to find other employment, but it was useless. Every one told me it was a dull season, and that I could not hope to find anything before spring. I was not willing to be dependent upon relations who were themselves poor, and to whom I could not help being a burden. Mr. Locke knew the Campbells, and — and — well, I am very happy here."

Mr. Allen was silent for a moment. He fidgeted uneasily in his chair, and began playing with a paper knife on the table.

"Miss Barry," he began abruptly, "would you care to go abroad with a family, as governess to two little girls?"

"To go abroad!" Ruth's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "Mr. Allen, you don't really mean —"

"I was dining with some friends this evening," the young man went on, "a Mr. and Mrs. Carrington. Carrington is an artist, and he has suddenly decided to take his family abroad for a few months. Their only difficulty is that they are obliged to take their two little girls out of school, and for that reason Mrs. Car-

rington is anxious to find some young lady who will be willing to go with them as governess. They are not rich people, so I don't suppose the salary would be large, but they are both charming, and any one travelling with them would be sure of a good time. They are going first to Italy, and later to Paris and Switzerland, I believe."

"But they wouldn't take me; I am too young and inexperienced. How old are the children?"

"Eight and ten, that's all; I imagine you would be capable of managing them. As for your age, Mrs. Carrington particularly said that she wanted a young girl. Well, the fact is, I took the liberty of mentioning you, and she seemed much pleased, and would like to have you call on her to-morrow.

"Of course I know that this is merely a temporary arrangement. The Campbells themselves regard it in that light, and would not dream of standing in the way of your getting a better position."

Ruth was silent. For years one of her brightest day dreams had been that of some

day going abroad. Mr. Allen's proposal fairly took away her breath. If she had only heard of this three weeks ago, before she had cast in her lot with her brother's family. She heard little Marjorie coughing in the next room; she thought of the rested look that was beginning to brighten her sister-in-law's tired face, and she wavered.

"You are very kind," she said slowly. "I have always thought that to go abroad would be one of the most delightful experiences in the world, but—but do you think it would be quite right for me to leave the Campbells now? They have been very kind to me. Mrs. Campbell took me in when she did not believe I could be of the least assistance to her."

"I am sure Nellie would be the first person to urge you to take advantage of this offer," said the artist, eagerly. "She is the most unselfish woman I know. I don't say it will not be a disappointment, for I know what a comfort you have been to them all, but you surely don't intend to go on forever sacrificing yourself for people who haven't the slightest claim upon you."

"I am not at all sure that I am making a sacrifice," said Ruth, smiling; "I have been very happy here, and as for the work, surely, Mr. Allen, you don't consider there is anything to be ashamed of in honest work of any kind."

"No, oh, no, of course not. I should be proud of any one of my sisters who could do what you are doing here; but for a girl like you, so young and—and fitted for so many better things—oh, Miss Barry, can't you see the absurdity of it all?"

"No, I can't," said Ruth, decidedly. "I am doing nothing of which I am the least bit ashamed. I would far rather wash and scrub floors than be dependent on relations who have neither the means nor the inclination to support me. Still, your offer is very tempting. Did you say I might call on this Mrs. Carrington to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning, she said. I will give you her address, and I am sure you will like her."

"Perhaps she may not like me, though," said Ruth, laughing, "and that will be more to the point, won't it?"

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"Oh, there's not the least doubt about that," returned the young man, so confidently that Ruth's eyes instinctively drooped and she was conscious of a little thrill of pleasure, the cause for which she did not quite understand.

"I have told her all about you, you see," Mr. Allen continued, "and — well, the fact is, she is quite enthusiastic on the subject. I don't know whether I shall be able to manage it or not, but if I succeed in selling one or two of my pictures, I want to try and run over to Paris for a month or two myself this spring. If I do, the Carringtons have asked me to join them."

Now whether this last piece of information had anything to do with it or not I cannot pretend to say, but certain it is that Ruth began suddenly to realize that this trip abroad was the one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world. She had never met the Carringtons, had never even heard of their existence until five minutes ago, and yet all at once it seemed to her as if she could not give up this one chance. She was only eighteen, and she had not found cooking and dish washing quite

such fascinating work as she had imagined in her first enthusiasm they would be. It certainly was very kind of Mr. Allen to take so much interest in her welfare.

"Tell me some more about the Carringtons," she said. "You spoke of two little girls; are there no other children?"

"There is a boy, but he is at a boarding-school, and is to be left there. Carrington is a very clever fellow and a first-rate artist, and his wife is delightful."

"I think I will go and see Mrs. Carrington to-morrow," said Ruth.

Mr. Allen looked pleased.

"I thought you would be sensible," he said approvingly. "You will be sure to enjoy the trip, and — hark, what's that?"

It was a strange, terrible sound, a sound which, when once heard, is seldom forgotten, and it brought Ruth and her companion to their feet in an instant.

"Croup," gasped Ruth, her face white with terror; "it must be Marjorie." And she darted into the bedroom shared by the three elder children, closely followed by the artist.

One glance at the little gasping, struggling figure, sitting up in bed, and stretching out imploring arms for help, was enough to convince Ruth that her worst fears were realized. Percy Allen, manlike, was helpless in this emergency, but Ruth did not lose her head.

"Run down to the drug store on the corner, and telephone for the doctor as quickly as you can," she commanded. "Dr. Jackson; you will find the address in the telephone book; it's quite close by. If he is out, telephone for some one else. Then come back here; I must have help."

"Will you know what to do? Shan't I call some of the neighbors?"

"No, it would be only wasting time. Mrs. Richards is away, and I don't know any of the other people in the house. I know a good deal about croup. One of the little girls at school had it terribly, and I have helped Madam to nurse her many a time. Now go quickly."

The young man obeyed, dashed downstairs, sent off his telephone message, and was back in less than five minutes. Then he and Ruth



began their work, she directing, he obeying her orders with unquestioning obedience. The first glance had told Ruth that this was no ordinary case; the child was desperately ill. Helpless, speechless, little Marjorie lay gasping for the breath which they feared every moment might cease altogether. The croup kettle was soon steaming in the room; all Madam's simple remedies were tried, but apparently without success. Bobby and Frank, awakened by the commotion, cowered under the bedclothes, trembling and crying with fright. It seemed to Ruth afterward that in that one evening she had grown years older. She worked as she had never worked in her life before, and over and over again she prayed, "Oh, God, save her, save her for her father's and mother's sake!"

It was some time before the doctor arrived, for there had at first been a mistake about the telephone message, and Ruth and Percy had begun to look at each other with white, hopeless faces. All they were doing seemed so utterly useless; the child seemed growing weaker every moment. But when at

last Dr. Jackson, a sensible-looking middle-aged man, with a quick, alert manner, appeared, he did not seem to consider the case as hopeless as they had feared.

"It's a pretty bad attack," he admitted in answer to Percy's anxious question, "but I have an idea that the worst of it is about over."

It was true. Gradually the terrible choking and gasping subsided; the agonized expression faded from the poor little face, and when Mr. and Mrs. Campbell returned at half-past eleven, Marjorie was sleeping quietly the sleep of utter exhaustion.

As soon as the first explanations had been given, and poor Mrs. Campbell's terror had been calmed, Ruth and Percy went into the parlor, leaving the father and mother to watch with Dr. Jackson, who had agreed to stay a little longer, in case of a recurrence of the attack.

"Well, Miss Barry, this has been a strange evening," began the young man, as Ruth dropped wearily into a chair, "but I believe you have saved that child's life. How did

now just what to do?"

Madam, of course; she has taught

me everything I know that is worth knowing." And then all at once, greatly to Percy's astonishment, Ruth buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"Miss Barry, I am so sorry. Oh, what can I do? Please let me get you something," cried the artist, his voice full of sympathy and dismay.

But Ruth, who was trembling from head to foot, shook her head resolutely.

"It's nothing, nothing at all," she sobbed. "I'm all right, only—only I'm so thankful, and I was so frightened."

"No one would have supposed that you were frightened," said the young man, regarding her with unmistakable admiration in his eyes. "I nearly lost my own nerve when I thought the poor little thing was dying, but you were as calm and composed all through as if you had been nursing children with croup from your cradle."

"People don't always show what they feel, then," said Ruth, drying her eyes, and trying to smile. "I was never so frightened in my life. Oh, Mr. Allen, it is horrible to see a little child suffer."

Just then Mr. Campbell and the doctor came into the room together. Arthur went straight up to Ruth and took her hand. He was looking pale and agitated.

"Miss Barry," he said unsteadily, "I don't know how to thank you for what you have done for us to-night. Dr. Jackson says that if it had not been for your prompt measures, nothing could have saved our little girl. Nellie and I can't express what we feel, but—but, I think you understand. She is our only girl."

He broke off abruptly, dropped Ruth's hand, and walked hurriedly away into the dining room.

"Mr. Allen," said Ruth, in a low voice, as the young artist came up to her to say good-night a few minutes later, "I have changed my mind about going abroad. Please tell your friend, Mrs. Carrington, that I am very much obliged to her for her kind offer, but that I have decided to remain where I am."

## CHAPTER IX

### AN INTERRUPTED CONVERSATION

"**Y**OU are looking dreadfully pale and tired, Ruth."

Mrs. Campbell spoke anxiously, and there was a troubled expression in her eyes, as she raised her head from the sofa cushions to take the cup of beef tea Ruth was holding out to her.

Ruth smiled reassuringly.

"I'm not one bit tired," she said, "and even if I were, nothing would do me half so much good as seeing you begin to look like yourself again. You are feeling a great deal better, aren't you, dear?"

"Indeed I am. Dr. Jackson said this morning that I have improved wonderfully during the past week. He attributes it all to your good nursing, and so does Arthur. I never recovered so quickly from one of my illnesses before."

Ruth looked both pleased and flattered.

"I love to take care of people," she said. "I think I shall sometime take a course in nursing, that is, if I can ever afford it. Now lie down again, and let me put the afghan over your feet. Then I'll get my sewing, and we'll have a nice cosey time all by ourselves. The twins are having a beautiful nap, and that nice Mrs. Richards has taken the other three out for a walk. She is a dear, good woman, if she does murder the king's English, and what a help and comfort she has been to us this anxious time!"

"She has indeed," Mrs. Campbell assented warmly. "Oh, Ruth, what a time it has been! First Marjorie having that dreadful attack of croup, and then all five coming down with the measles at once. Then just as we thought everything was all over, to think of my being laid up for three whole weeks."

Ruth laughed.

"Well, things are certainly straightening themselves out nicely now," she said. "The children are all as well as can be, you are gaining strength every day, and Mr. Campbell says

business is so prosperous just now that he thinks he will be able to take you all to the mountains for a while this summer. He was talking about it this morning at breakfast. He says he knows of a lovely place in Vermont."

"Yes, I know, East Riverton; we were there once before, and it is lovely, right in the heart of the Green Mountains. Percy Allen's father is the Episcopal clergyman there. Percy told us about the place, and his family were all so kind to us the summer we were there. There is a large hotel in the village, but of course that was too expensive for us, so we boarded at a farmhouse. The farmer's family were so good to the children, and they did have such a beautiful time, poor darlings. Maud was a baby then, and Frank not quite two, but Marjorie and Bobby were in the fields all day, and it was such a splendid change for us all. I hope we can go this summer, but I am almost afraid to let myself think about it."

"Think about it just as much as you like," said Ruth, cheerfully. "You know they say it never rains but it pours. Well, I have a theory that when nice things once begin happening

they keep right on. I have a feeling in my bones, as dear old Madam used to say, that you are going to have lots of good luck this year."

Mrs. Campbell closed her eyes with a little sigh of content. It was a new experience in her busy, anxious life to be petted and waited upon, and, above all, to be told to expect good fortune. Even as a child she had heard much more about failure than about success.

"I think the good luck began when you came to us," she said. "Oh, Ruth, how can I ever thank you enough?"

"Please don't try," said Ruth, stooping to kiss the sweet, pale face, and then she hurried out of the room, returning in a moment with her constant companion, the big mending basket. It seemed to Ruth sometimes as if that basket must be possessed of some magic power of filling itself, for the more she mended the more there seemed to be to mend, and many a time had she blessed sensible Miss Molton for including sewing among the accomplishments taught in her somewhat old-fashioned school.



"Ruth," said Mrs. Campbell, abruptly, breaking a silence which had lasted for several minutes, "when are you going to begin to look for a situation?"

Ruth gave a violent start, and the stocking she was darning dropped unheeded into her lap.

"Arthur and I were talking about it last night," Mrs. Campbell went on, speaking fast and rather nervously. "When you came to us we understood, of course, that it was only to stay until you could find something better. You have been—oh, no words can express what you have been to us all, but we don't feel that we have any right to stand in the way of your finding a really good position. You know next week will be the first of May."

"Do you mean that you would like to have me look for a situation next week?" Ruth asked, smiling.

"Like it? Oh, my dear, it isn't a question of liking. I must try and think of what is right and best for you. You have been so good to me that I am afraid of growing selfish."

"You selfish!" exclaimed Ruth, incredulous.

lously. "You say you are trying to think of what is good for me. Well, I can tell you that nothing in this world is quite so good for me as doing just what I am. You know I am earning fourteen dollars a month now. Mr. Campbell insisted on paying me something when the children were getting over the measles and you were taken ill. I objected at first, but he was so decided that I had to yield in the end. A person can do a great deal with fourteen dollars a month."

Mrs. Campbell was weak from her recent illness, and the tears started to her eyes.

"I believe you are one of the best women in the world," she said impulsively, holding out her hand.

Ruth gave the thin fingers an affectionate squeeze, and winked hard to keep back a suspicious moisture in her own eyes.

"Besides, you mustn't talk about what I have done for you," she went on practically. "Perhaps you won't believe me when I tell you that I have been happier since I came here than ever before in my life."

Mrs. Campbell smiled rather incredulously.

"You are very good to say it, but — well, I can't understand. You are so young and pretty; there are so many attractions in the world for a girl like you."

"When I left school," said Ruth, earnestly, "the thing I longed for most was a home. I had never had a real home, and I remember that even when I was a little girl I used to envy those who had homes to go to in the vacations, and families who cared about them. Nobody seemed to care particularly about me, although every one was kind. When I came here, a perfect stranger to you all, you took me right into your home, as if I belonged to you. It made me very happy, and I have grown happier and happier every week, until now it seems to me as if one of the greatest trials that could possibly happen to me would be to have to leave you."

"You really mean that, Ruth? You really mean that you would rather stay here in this plain little flat, slaving from morning till night, than live in some wealthy family as governess or companion, perhaps even travel?"

"I really mean it," said Ruth, simply.

"But of course it can't always go on like this," Mrs. Campbell said, when they had been silent for a few moments, and had each wiped away a few happy tears. "As soon as I am strong again you must look for a situation, something that will pay you better, and you can stay with us just the same. If you could get a position in a school, it would be nice, for you could come back to us every evening. Arthur says that if business continues to improve we shall move into a larger flat in the autumn, and in that case you could have a better room, and I might be able to afford a really good servant. I declare, Ruth, you have done me so much good that I am beginning to believe in your good-luck theory."

Ruth laughed merrily.

"It will all come true, just as I have predicted, see if it doesn't," she said. "There's the door-bell; it must be the children come home."

She rose quickly and hurried to open the door, assured by the sound of shrill little voices that her surmise was correct. But there was a surprise for her, nevertheless, for towering

above the three children was another figure, a tall young man, with a large bunch of violets in his hand.

"Oh, Miss Barry," shouted Bobby, joyfully, "something splendid is going to happen. We was just coming home with Mrs. Richards, and on the corner we saw Uncle Percy bringing violets to Muzzie. He's going to take us all to the park, and you too."

"Mr. Allen is very kind," said Ruth, shaking hands with the young artist as she spoke, "but I am afraid I shall have to decline the invitation. I must stay with Muzzie and the twins, you know."

"No, you mustn't," said the young man with conviction. "Mrs. Richards is coming to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Campbell, and will look after the babies while you are out. So hurry and get your hat. You look as if you needed a little fresh air."

Ruth smiled, but she did not argue the point, as she might have done some weeks before. This was not the first time she had noticed an air of authority in Mr. Allen's manner toward her, and oddly enough, for

she was, as a rule, a very independent young person, she did not feel at all inclined to resent it. So without making any further objection to the proposed plan, she followed Percy and the children to the sitting room, where the artist received a warm welcome from Mrs. Campbell, whose pale face brightened when she heard of the arrangement for the afternoon.

"I am so glad you are going to take Ruth out," she said, as she buried her face in the cool, fragrant violets. "I have been trying all day to persuade her to go for a walk, it looked so lovely, but she wouldn't listen to me. She pretends she is too lazy, but of course I know better. It is just another instance of her selfishness. Marjorie dear, run and put these lovely flowers in water."

Marjorie left the room with the flowers, being promptly followed by the two little boys. Ruth had already gone to put on her hat and jacket.

"I have a piece of good news to tell you, Nellie," said Percy, when he and Mrs. Campbell were left alone together. "I have sold one of my pictures."

"Oh, Percy, I am so glad. Now I suppose you will really be able to go abroad at last." Mrs. Campbell's eyes were shining with genuine pleasure.

To her surprise, the young man did not answer at once, and when he did speak he flushed more than the occasion seemed to demand.

"I have not decided," he said slowly; "I am not sure what I shall do. I may think it best to wait another year. This will make a big difference in my life, though. The collector who bought my picture has asked me to paint another for him this summer."

"How perfectly delightful!" cried Mrs. Campbell, enthusiastically. "Arthur will be delighted, and so will all your friends. Here comes Ruth; I must tell her. Ruth dear, such good news; Percy has sold one of his pictures."

If Percy had been gratified by Mrs. Campbell's reception of his news, he was no less pleased by the manner in which it was received by Ruth. The bright, frank smile the girl gave him and her few hearty words of congratulation possibly meant more to the

young artist than all his old friend's expressions of delight.

"Be sure and come back to dinner, Percy," Mrs. Campbell said, as they were starting for the park a few minutes later. "You must tell Arthur the good news yourself."

"Yes, do come back to dinner, Uncle Percy," chimed in Bobby, with a joyful skip, "and we'll stop at the ice cream store on the way home."

"You greedy little monkey," laughed Ruth; "you never forget ice cream, even under the most unfavorable circumstances. Do you remember the day when they were all so ill with the measles, Mr. Allen? Bobby had been lying with his eyes closed all day; he had refused to notice even his mother, and we were dreadfully worried about him. The moment he heard your voice he opened his eyes, a smile came over his face, and he murmured faintly, 'Uncle Percy, now we shall have ice cream.'"

"Yes, and I believe that ice cream cured him," said Percy, laughing, "for he began to improve from that moment. Now, Miss Barry,



I propose that we take a car down as far as Sixty-fourth Street. From there we can easily walk to the menagerie, as I believe these young people have set their hearts on seeing the animals."

It was a beautiful afternoon, and Ruth had not been out of doors five minutes before she realized the truth of Percy's assertion that a little fresh air would do her good. She had naturally been confined to the house a great deal lately. She had seen a good deal of Percy Allen during the past two months, and she sometimes wondered what the young artist would say when he learned, as of course he must some day learn, the truth about herself.

The visit to the menagerie was a great success. Little Frank was at first disposed to be rather afraid of the lions, but he was soon reassured, and the monkeys proved a source of great amusement to every one.

"Well, Miss Barry, don't you think we have had about enough of this?" Percy inquired, when they had spent fully half an hour in the monkey house, and also inspected many of the

other animals. "What do you say to a ride on the donkeys before we go home, children?"

There was an eager chorus of "goody, goody" from the three delighted children, and the party turned their backs on the menagerie, considerably to the relief of the two elder members at least.

"How lovely and peaceful it is here," remarked Ruth, with a little sigh of content, when the children had trotted away, each mounted on a decidedly weary-looking donkey, and she and Percy had seated themselves on one of the benches to await their return. "One could almost fancy one's self miles away from the noisy city."

"I had a letter from my friend Carrington this morning," said Percy, rather relevantly. "They are having a delightful trip."

"Are they? That is good. I was thinking only yesterday what a fortunate thing it was that I decided not to go with them."

"Fortunate," repeated the young man, indignantly. "Decidedly fortunate for the Campbells, I should say, but scarcely for yourself. You don't mean to tell me that you prefer the

kind of work you have been doing for the past two months to travelling in Italy with the Carringtons?"

"Yes, I do mean it," said Ruth, so earnestly that he could not doubt the truth of her words. "I have been of some little use here, and I have made some very true friends. I don't think I ever quite knew what a real home was till this winter."

"Well, you have certainly proved a blessing to poor little Nellie. What she would have done without you in all this illness and trouble, I don't like to think. But, look here, Miss Barry, this isn't going on much longer, is it?"

"What?" Ruth inquired innocently.

"You know what I mean. You are not going to be a slave to those people all your days. I thought it was understood from the first to be only a temporary arrangement."

"I have been talking about my future plans with Mrs. Campbell to-day," said Ruth, quietly. "I shall stay with her as long as she needs me, which will probably be for some time yet, as she is not at all strong."

Percy uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Do you mean to tell me that you intend to continue working yourself to death all summer in that crowded flat?"

"Certainly I do, unless the Campbells go to the country, in which case, I suppose I shall have to look for another boarding place."

"But it is absurd, unheard of; your friends will surely interfere. They will never allow you to make such a sacrifice of yourself."

"I don't think there is much of a sacrifice in it," said Ruth, smiling, "and as to friends, the Campbells are the best friends I have in the world."

"But your relations—they will never consent to such an absurd piece of folly."

"The only relation who ever troubled himself much about me is my uncle, and when I had finished my education, he frankly told me that he expected me to look after myself for the future."

"Then if there is no one else to interfere, I must."

"You!" Ruth felt her heart throbbing painfully fast, and her cheeks were burning. She and her companion had the bench to them-

selves, and the few passers-by had no notion of the little drama that was being enacted before their very eyes.

"Yes, I," repeated the young man, his voice growing suddenly very grave and earnest, while an expression that Ruth had never seen before came into his face. "Ruth, I wish I had the right to —"

"Good Heavens, what is the matter?"

"Miss Barry, Uncle Percy, oh, come quick, please do come quick," shrieked a terrified little voice, and Marjorie, her hair flying, her eyes big with fright, came running toward them with outstretched arms.

Ruth and Percy were on their feet in an instant, demanding breathlessly:—

"What is it? What has happened?"

"It's Bobby," wailed Marjorie. "His face is all bleeding. He wanted to whip the donkey, and the donkey boy said he mustn't. Then he said he would get off, and go and tell Uncle Percy. He wouldn't let the boy lift him down, and he fell and cut his face dreadfully. He's crying, and the blood is all running down on his clean waist. Oh, please, please, come quick."

## CHAPTER X

### PERCY ALLEN EXPRESSES AN OPINION

**I**T did not take Percy and Ruth many minutes to reach the scene of the disaster. There they found Bobby sitting on the ground, roaring lustily, the blood pouring from a cut in his lip, while little Frank wailed from sympathy, and the donkey boys stood, each holding his respective donkey, and offered sympathy and reproaches by turns. At sight of his friends Bobby sprang to his feet, and flung himself sobbing into Uncle Percy's arms.

"Well, well, this is a nice state of affairs," exclaimed the young man, in a tone of mingled vexation and relief. "Not very badly hurt, after all. Don't be frightened, Miss Barry, it is only his lip that is cut. A little cold water will soon set everything right. Stop crying, Bobby, and tell me what you meant by behaving so badly. Didn't Miss Barry tell

you to mind the boy, and to be sure not to get off the donkey by yourself?"

Bobby, who had expected nothing but sympathy, stopped short in the middle of a roar, in sheer astonishment.

"I — I wanted to — to make the donkey go faster," he whimpered. "I didn't mean to hurt him, I truly didn't, but he was so slow. Marjorie's and Frank's donkeys were much faster."

"And so you thought you would take the management of affairs into your own hands, and when the boy naturally objected to have his donkey whipped, you disobeyed orders, and tried to get down by yourself. Oh, Bobby, I am ashamed of you. Now come and get your face washed, and we will go home."

Ten minutes later the party had left the park and boarded a homeward-bound car. Bobby, silent and repentant, had squeezed himself into a corner, and turned his back resolutely upon all the other occupants of the car, his one desire being to avoid the stern, disapproving gaze of Uncle Percy. The car was crowded, and there was no opportunity for private conversation. Ruth held Marjorie on

one knee, and Frank on the other, while Percy was obliged to stand all the way.

"I think I had better take Bobby into the janitor's room, and ask Mrs. Lane to let me wash his face there," said Ruth, as they turned the familiar corner, and the children started a race to see which would reach home first. "He still looks rather bloody, and I am afraid his mother may be frightened if she sees him like this. The rest of you can go upstairs, and tell Mrs. Campbell that Bobby and I have stopped for a moment on the way."

This seemed a wise plan, and was accordingly carried out, Percy with the two other children going directly up to the Campbells' apartment, while Ruth and Bobby lingered behind, and Ruth rang the janitor's bell. The door was opened by the janitor himself.

"Mr. Lane," said Ruth, pleasantly, "we have come to ask you a favor. Bobby has met with a slight accident; he fell off one of the donkeys in the park, and cut his lip rather badly. Do you think your wife would mind my washing his face in her room before his mother sees him?"



The janitor was, as a rule, a very polite young man, and Ruth had often been amused by his elaborate bows and profuse expressions of civility. Great was her surprise, therefore, when, instead of a polite assurance that nothing could give Mrs. Lane greater pleasure, he merely muttered something inaudible, and moved aside to let her pass. She noticed that his face looked flushed and his eyes were blood-shot, and for the moment she was inclined to think that he was not quite sober.

Mrs. Lane, who had evidently heard the request, now presented herself, and Ruth saw that she too was looking very unlike herself, and that her eyes were red and swollen as if from recent crying. She was more civil than her husband, however, and at once led the way to the bath-room, where a sponge and towel were produced, and then stood by in silence while Bobby's face was bathed and dried, and the small boy was made to look a little more presentable. Mrs. Lane was usually a very talkative person, and Ruth could not help feeling rather uncomfortable.

"Bobby and I are very much obliged to

you," she said, trying to speak in her natural tone, as she and her little nephew turned to go. "I hope your baby is well, Mrs. Lane."

"He's very well, thank you, miss," the woman returned in a low, subdued voice, and then she held the door open for them to pass out.

"Didn't Mr. Lane look cross?" whispered Bobby, as they went upstairs. Bobby's spirits were rising rapidly, now that the traces of his accident had been removed and the hour for ice cream was drawing near.

"I think he looked as if he were unhappy about something, and Mrs. Lane, too," said Ruth, thoughtfully, and then Mrs. Richards appeared on the landing and had to be given an account of Bobby's mishap, and Ruth had soon forgotten all about the janitor's family affairs.

Poor Bobby's troubles were not over quite so soon as he had fondly imagined. When Mrs. Campbell learned what had happened, she was both vexed and distressed, and speedily decreed that a deprivation of ice cream would be a fitting punishment for the delin-

quent. When Muzzie decided that a certain thing was to be, the children knew well there was no use in arguing the point, so Bobby retired to nurse his cut lip and think over his wrongs, while Marjorie and Frank spoke in whispers of how very naughty their brother had been, and secretly rejoiced a little over their own superior virtue.

"I declare, Ruth, you look worlds better for your walk," said Mrs. Campbell, with an affectionate glance at the girl's bright face, as Ruth bent to arrange the sofa cushions more comfortably. "I am so glad you made her go out, Percy; I wish you would make her take a walk every day."

"I intend to try," said the young man, quietly, but in a tone of such significance, to Ruth at least, that she turned away abruptly, lest her sister-in-law should observe her blushes, and hurried off to the kitchen to see about dinner.

There is certainly nothing very romantic about the cooking of a dinner, and yet as Ruth went about her accustomed tasks that evening, it seemed to her as if the world had suddenly

changed from a rather commonplace affair into a wonderful, beautiful place. The little plainly furnished flat might have been a fairy palace for aught she knew to the contrary, for was not the prince — her prince — in it? She knew that if Marjorie had not appeared just at that critical moment, Percy would have told her something that would have changed her whole future life. But it had only been postponed a little, this wonderful thing that was going to happen to her. To-morrow Percy would ask her to go for another walk. They would take the children to the park again, and perhaps sit on that very bench, and then — and then — she dared not let her happy thoughts wander beyond this point.

There was just one little shadow of anxiety mingled with Ruth's happiness. Of course she must tell Percy her real name, and explain all about the deception she had practised on her family. Would he be annoyed about it, she wondered, and insist upon her telling Arthur everything at once? She would rather have waited a little longer, until the family prospects were somewhat brighter. Still, if

Percy were very firm — well, she did not believe her brother would really be very angry. Arthur and Nellie both seemed rather fond of her, and when they knew how much she wanted to go right on working for them, perhaps they would let her have her way, after all.

Dinner was a rather embarrassing meal for one member of the little family that evening. Ruth kept her eyes on her plate most of the time, for whenever she raised them and happened to glance in Percy's direction, she was almost sure to find him looking at her, with that same expression she had seen for the first time that afternoon. Then her cheeks would tingle uncomfortably, greatly to her annoyance. Every one else was in excellent spirits. Mrs. Campbell was decidedly better, and her husband's pleasure and relief at having her once more at the table showed themselves in an access of almost boyish delight. The children were of the opinion that Uncle Percy had never been quite so jolly before. Even Bobby forgot his disgrace, and the deprivation of ice cream, in laughing over the artist's funny stories. If Ruth was unusually silent, nobody

appeared to notice the fact, except possibly Percy himself, and he interpreted her silence in his own way, and, on the whole, was not displeased by it.

When the dishes had been washed and put away and the children were all in bed, Ruth came into the parlor, as was her custom, and sat down by her sister-in-law's sofa with her sewing. Percy had brought his guitar, and was playing some of the simple, old-fashioned melodies they all liked. Mrs. Campbell was very fond of music, and now she lay listening with half-closed eyes, in a state of delicious content. Arthur read his newspaper, and smoked his cigar in happy silence. Altogether, it was a peaceful, homelike scene, and one that Ruth remembered for many a long day.

A ring at the door-bell was the first sound to disturb the perfect harmony. Ruth rose hastily, but Percy was before her.

"Stay where you are, Miss Barry," he said authoritatively, and was out of the room before she could utter a word of protest. He returned in a moment.

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"It's the janitor. He wants to know if he can speak to you for a few moments, Campbell."

Mr. Campbell rose and left the room. They heard him speaking pleasantly to the visitor, and then both men went into the dining room, and the voices became inaudible.

"Sing something, Percy," said Mrs. Campbell, "I haven't heard you sing in an age."

The young man laughed, declared he was out of practice, but finally yielded, and after preluding a few notes on the guitar, began in a clear, rich tenor:—

"Once when the sun in slowly dying splendor  
Sank, sending crimson smiles across the sea ;  
When in the twilight eyes looked soft and tender,  
'Tell me,' you said, 'how great your love for me.'

"Darker and darker grew the scene before us ;  
Turning, I saw a shadow at your side ;  
Mist filled the sky, and hid the pale stars o'er us ;  
Speaking as in a dream, I thus replied :

" 'Some measure love by words ;  
By endless time ; by boundless sea ;  
But I, I love you well enough  
To leave you, love, if needs must be.' "

"There's another verse," said Percy, "but I have forgotten the words."

"I am glad you have," said Nellie, laughing. "The tune is pretty, but the words are so foolish."

"You don't admire the sentimental ballads, then?"

"Oh, some of them are well enough, but it sounds so silly to hear a man talking about loving a girl enough to leave her. That isn't my idea of loving."

"You believe, then, that if people are in love, they should stick to each other under all circumstances."

"Of course I do; every sensible person does, unless, of course, one of them happened to be married to somebody else. That might make a difference, I admit."

"There might be other reasons," said Percy, rather more gravely than the subject seemed to demand. "The man might have realized that the woman would be happier married to some other fellow, and in that case the best thing for him to do would be to take himself out of the way, don't you think so?"

"No, I don't," said Nellie, with decision. "I think that if he really loved her in the right



way, he would try to make her love him. Don't you agree with me, Ruth?"

"Yes," said Ruth, in a rather low tone and with her eyes bent steadily on her sewing.

Percy laughed, and the subject was dropped. Mrs. Campbell asked for another song, and this time Percy chose a rollicking Irish ballad which made both his hearers laugh.

"What can that man be talking to Arthur about all this time?" remarked Nellie, as the clock struck nine.

"Perhaps he is thinking of investing some money, and wants Campbell's advice on the subject," Percy suggested.

"I am afraid he and his wife are in trouble of some kind," said Ruth. "I stopped in their rooms to wash Bobby's face this afternoon, and I never saw two people so changed. He never uttered a word, and she looked as if she had been crying her eyes out, poor thing."

Nellie looked really concerned.

"I am very sorry," she said. "They are such nice, respectable people. When we first moved here, Lane was a bachelor, and Mrs. Lane was doing general housework for a family

on the second floor. They fell in love with each other, and were married last year. I shall never forget Lane's radiant face when he told us of his engagement. She was a widow, and I imagine had had rather a hard time. Lane's mother lived with him before he married, but she has gone to the country to live with a married daughter now."

"There, he's going," said Ruth; "I hear the dining-room door open."

A moment later Mr. Campbell came into the room.

"Well, what was it all about?" Nellie inquired with interest, as her husband threw himself rather wearily into a chair.

"Poor Lane has been telling me his troubles, which are rather serious, by the way," said Arthur, gravely.

"He hasn't lost any money, I hope," said Nellie, her thoughts at once flying to the trouble which had always been apparent in her own life.

"No, not money, but I imagine he thinks he has lost something worse. You know his wife was a widow when he married her."

"Yes, of course, we all knew that. Oh, Arthur, you don't mean that her first husband wasn't really dead?"

"No, not quite so bad as that; but when she married Lane she omitted to mention one rather important fact. She has had three children by her former husband, and they are all alive."

"Good gracious, Arthur, what made her do such a thing? I don't believe Lane would have minded; he seems very fond of our children."

"He says he would not have objected if he had been told at the time, but what he does object to, and very decidedly, is the deception in the case. Mrs. Lane claims that if she had confessed the existence of the children before marriage, she was afraid he might have been frightened off, as she expresses it, so she boarded them out with a cousin in the country, and there they have been ever since. She says she intended to confess as soon as the wedding was over, but her courage gave out, and so things have drifted on until to-day, when the cousin appeared, bringing the eldest boy with her. Of course there was an explanation and

a scene, in which I imagine Lane used pretty strong language. Indeed, he is still in anything but an amiable frame of mind toward his wife. He came to pour out his woes to me, and I hope I have succeeded in persuading him to let things alone, for the present, at least. Mrs. Lane is a good little soul, though as weak as dish-water, and I think she is really fond of him."

"Poor thing," said Nellie, sympathetically; "how dreadfully frightened she must have been! She did wrong, of course, but then, she is so dreadfully ignorant."

"Do you think ignorance a sufficient excuse for deceiving her husband in such an outrageous way?" Percy inquired, smiling rather grimly.

"Well, one can't expect as much from an ignorant person as from an intelligent one," Nellie maintained, as usual trying to make excuses for wrong-doers.

"Perhaps not, but a lie is a lie, and a deception is a deception. I suppose she will expect him to go right on trusting her, just as if nothing had happened."

"Yes, and I hope he will, too. Because she was frightened into deceiving him once, there is no reason to conclude that she will do it again."

"I could never trust a person who had once deceived me," observed Percy, with the stern righteousness of untried youth. "'Tell the truth and shame the devil,' is my motto."

"You won't talk in that strain when you are a few years older," declared Arthur, laughing. "Because you are the soul of truthfulness and honor yourself, you can't expect to find every other mortal living up to your high ideals."

"I daresay you are right, and I don't expect to find the world made up of saints," argued Percy, warming with the interest of his subject. "All I say is, that when I find a person has been deceiving me and telling me lies,—even what some people call harmless lies,—I have no further use for him. Miss Barry, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, no, it is nothing, I am quite well," faltered Ruth. She had risen hurriedly from her seat, and was moving toward the door. They all noticed that she had grown very pale.

Percy was at her side in a moment.

"Let me open the window; you feel faint, I know you do," he persisted anxiously, but Ruth shook her head.

"No, no, I am all right, indeed I am. It is a little warm here, and — and I have a headache, that is all. Please let me pass. I am going to my room for a little while. I am rather tired, and I think I shall go to bed. Good night, every one; if you want anything, Mrs. Campbell, be sure to call me."

Safe in her own little room, with the door closed behind her, Ruth's first action was to fling herself face downward on the bed, burying her face in the pillow, and shaking from head to foot with great, choking sobs.

"Oh, I was so happy, so happy," she moaned, in the utter abandonment of the first real grief of her life, "and now, now I shall never be happy again. When he knows, he will despise me. Oh, why did I do it — why did I ever do it?"

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE NEWS THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

**R**UTH'S first sensation on waking next morning was one of bewilderment, and for several minutes she lay wondering drowsily why her eyes felt so hot and heavy, and what could be the cause of that dull pain at her heart. Then suddenly she remembered everything, and turning her face to the wall, with a long sigh, tried to go to sleep again. But there was no more sleep for her that morning, and as she lay with half-closed eyes, she recalled with vivid distinctness every incident of the previous evening.

She remembered how she had lain for a long time on her bed, crying softly in the darkness, how she had heard voices in the hall, and known that Percy was going away, and how Nellie had come to her door and knocked, but on receiving no answer had gone away again, probably supposing her to be asleep. Then at

last, when everything was still, she had risen, lighted the gas, and prepared for bed. She had not expected to sleep, she remembered, but sleep had come, nevertheless, possibly because she was so very tired.

The striking of the clock in the kitchen roused her from these reflections. It was only six, and she remembered, with a sense of relief, that it was Sunday morning, and that she need not move for another hour. But in a little while she was seized with a nervous restlessness that made her long to be at work, and springing out of bed, she began a hasty toilet. It was a lovely spring morning; the air that came in through the open window was soft and balmy, and the sparrows were chirping merrily on a budding wistaria vine in one of the neighboring yards. But there was no responsive gladness in the girl's heart. For the first time in her life she was learning the meaning of real pain.

"I will tell Arthur and Nellie everything this very day," she said to herself. "It is Sunday, so Arthur will be at home all day. I will wait till the twins are asleep, and all the



others gone to play on the sidewalk, and then I will tell them all I have done. I have kept up this foolish deception quite long enough. If they will forgive me, I will ask them to let me stay here and go on working as I have done; but if Arthur is angry, I will go away somewhere, it doesn't matter where," she ended, with a sigh of utter hopelessness.

She was busy preparing breakfast when Nellie, in wrapper and slippers, came softly into the kitchen, a twin under each arm.

"Would you mind keeping them here a little while, Ruth?" she asked. "They are so lively, and I hate to have Arthur disturbed on a Sunday morning. He works so hard all the week, poor fellow. I heard you moving, or I wouldn't have bothered you, either. How is your head?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Ruth, with assumed cheerfulness. "Here, give me these youngsters, and then get back to bed as quickly as you can. You are not to stir until you've had your breakfast."

"Nonsense," returned Nellie, laughing, and delivering her babies to her sister-in-law's

strong arms. "I am perfectly well now, and I intend to eat my breakfast with the rest of you."

Ruth shook her head, and made a butt at her with one of the twins, at which Nellie retired, laughing and protesting.

Mrs. Campbell kept her word, and for the first time in several weeks appeared at the breakfast table, greatly to her husband's delight. Arthur always declared that home never seemed like home unless his wife was sitting at the head of the table, with a child on either side of her.

"Isn't it a lovely Sunday?" remarked Marjorie, in a tone of satisfaction, as Ruth tied on her bib. "The sky looks so nice and blue, and the pansies are all coming out in Muzzie's pot, and we're going to have griddle cakes for breakfast."

"How do you know we are going to have griddle cakes?" inquired Ruth, laughing.

"Bobby and me both smell 'em," was Marjorie's confident reply, at which everybody smiled.

"It really is a beautiful day," Arthur said

with a glance at the open window, through which the bright morning sunshine was pouring. "I have a great mind to hire a carriage, and take you for a drive this afternoon, Nellie."

A shade of anxiety crossed Mrs. Campbell's pale face.

"No, Arthur dear, please don't," she said gently. "Carriages are so dreadfully expensive, and I am feeling so much stronger that I am sure I shall be able to walk very soon. Suppose we take all the children to the park to-day. It is such a little walk to the car, I know I could manage it, and it would be so pleasant to sit on a bench and watch the people."

Arthur said nothing, but he stifled a sigh as he took up his newspaper. Many and many a time had a similar gentle reminder from his wife checked him in some act of extravagance which his own good sense told him would be foolish, but which his love for her made him long to carry out. They could afford so little beyond the bare necessities of life.

"Cakes and maple syrup are the next best

thing to ice cream," observed Bobby, as Ruth handed round the first batch of hot buckwheats. "I'm going to eat six."

"You are not going to do anything of the sort," said his mother, with decision. "Too many hot cakes are very bad for little boys. Besides, people who disobey and jump off of donkeys — oh, Arthur dear, what is it?"

With a low exclamation of dismay, Mr. Campbell had dropped the newspaper, and now sat regarding his wife with a very strange expression in his eyes.

"My uncle is dead," he said in a voice that trembled a little.

"Your uncle! oh, Arthur, are you sure?" Nellie's fork fell into her plate, and she turned rather white.

"It must have been very sudden," said Arthur, recovering his usual manner; and taking up the paper again, he read aloud. "'At his late residence, 41 West — St., John Campbell, in the seventy-second year of his age.' I saw him in the street one day last week, and he looked as well as he has done any time these past ten years."

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There was a short pause, and then Nellie asked rather timidly:—

“What do you suppose he has done with all his money, Arthur?”

“Heaven knows; he was eccentric enough to have done anything, but by every just law it ought to go to my little half-sister. She and I were his nearest relatives.”

“What’s the matter, Miss Barry—have you got a very bad headache?” inquired the ever watchful Marjorie. Both her parents were too much absorbed in their own affairs to notice the sudden pallor which had overspread Ruth’s face.

The girl rose quickly and left the room, motioning to Marjorie to follow her. She was shaking from head to foot.

“Marjorie,” she said in a hurried whisper, “don’t say anything about it, but I don’t feel very well. I shall be all right again in a few minutes, and I don’t want Muzzie to worry. Tell them I am making some more cakes, and will be back very soon. Do you understand?”

Marjorie nodded, and the old, anxious look came into her face.

"We mustn't worry Muzzie," she said decidedly, and hurried back to the breakfast table, where Ruth heard her informing the family that "Miss Barry was going to make some more nice hot cakes."

When Ruth returned to the dining room five minutes later, carrying a dish heaped with fresh buckwheats, the only visible signs of her recent agitation were a slight pallor round the lips, and a little unsteadiness in her hands as she filled the children's plates. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell had also quite recovered their composure, and indeed it was not until just as they were leaving the table, that any further allusion was made to the news. Then Nellie inquired: —

"Have you any idea where your sister is now, Arthur?"

"At school, I believe. I know my uncle placed her at some Western school several years ago, and Locke told me he had never had her at home, even for the holidays."

"It seems strange that she should never have written to you. Of course when she was a child one wouldn't have expected it, but she must be almost grown up now."

"She is only eighteen, and has probably forgotten my very existence. When my uncle turned me adrift, he forbade my keeping up any intercourse with the members of his household. Little Ruth was only nine then, and it is likely enough that she has never heard my name since."

Nellie sighed as she rose, and went to comfort one of the twins, who was crying in the baby-tender.

"Mrs. Campbell," said Ruth, coming into her sister-in-law's room half an hour later, "I should like to go out for a little while this morning; have you any objection?"

Nellie, who was engaged in giving Cecil his bath, looked up in some surprise.

"Certainly I have no objection," she said, "but, Ruth dear, how pale you are this morning. I am sure you are not well."

"Oh, yes, I am," said Ruth, reassuringly, "but—but I am a little troubled about something, and I should like to go and see an old friend."

"Oh, Ruth, I am sorry; I hope it isn't anything serious."

"Mrs. Campbell," said Ruth, drawing a step nearer and laying her hand impulsively on her sister-in-law's arm; "I want to ask you a favor. Will you promise me something?"

"Of course I will, dear, if I can; what is it?"

"Will you promise me that if you should ever find that I had deceived you in any way, — not been altogether truthful about things, I mean, — that you will try not to blame me any more than you can help? I may have made a great mistake, I may have done very wrong, but I thought I was acting for the best, I did indeed."

There was no mistaking the earnest appeal in the girl's voice, and Mrs. Campbell's answer was to take both Ruth's hands in hers; as she looked with real affection into the troubled young face.

"You are the best friend I have ever had, Ruth," she said gently, "I don't believe I could be angry with you even if I tried, and I certainly don't intend to try."

Ruth bent and kissed her, and then, without another word, she turned and hurried out of the room.



It was with strangely mingled feelings that Ruth approached her uncle's house for the first time in more than three months. Mr. Campbell had never expressed any desire to see her, and she had been too proud to force herself upon him uninvited. She had learned through Mr. Locke that her uncle had casually inquired how she was getting on, and having been informed by the lawyer that she was contented in her situation and seemed inclined to remain in it, he had appeared quite satisfied, and asked no more questions on the subject. She could not honestly say that she had ever loved the old man, and yet there was something unspeakably sad to her in the thought that he should have died alone, with no one of his own blood near him at the last.

The old house looked much as usual, and when Martha appeared in answer to Ruth's ring, she looked as stolid and unprepossessing as ever. Her face did not brighten at sight of the visitor, but she stood aside to let her enter.

"When did it happen?" Ruth asked in a low voice as she stepped into the hall, and Martha closed the front door.

"Last evening," the woman answered; "we don't know just what time. He came home at about four, and when I went to call him to come down to his dinner at six, he was lying back in his chair. I saw there was something the matter, and I got the dressmaker's little boy next door to go for a doctor. When the doctor came, he said Mr. Campbell must have been dead for some time. He thinks he just dropped off sudden, without no pain nor nothing. He had trouble with his heart, it seems."

Ruth breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am so glad he didn't suffer," she said softly. "Has Mr. Locke been here?"

"Oh, yes, I sent for him right away; I didn't know who else to send for. He's attended to everything, and he's upstairs now."

"I should like to see him; may I go up?"

Martha nodded, and Ruth went softly up the stairs to the library where she had found her uncle on the night of her arrival more than three months before. There was no fire in the grate now, as the day was warm, but otherwise the room looked just as usual, only instead of

her uncle in the arm-chair, Mr. Locke was sitting by the table, looking over a pile of papers.

At the sound of approaching footsteps the old lawyer turned his head, and the next moment he had left his seat and was hurrying forward to greet the visitor.

"I am glad you have come," he said, taking the girl's hand and leading her to a chair. "I wasn't sure whether you would see the notice in the paper or not, and I was coming round to look you up in a little while. Have you told Arthur the truth about yourself yet?"

Ruth shook her head.

"I intended telling him this morning," she said, "but when I heard the news about Uncle John, I thought I would come and see you first. Oh, Mr. Locke, it is so sad; are you sure he didn't suffer?"

"Quite sure. He has had heart trouble for a good many years, and his physician had warned him that he would probably die very suddenly. He has often told me that, when the end came, he hoped it would be while he was asleep. I don't think, though, that he had any idea it would come so soon."

"Poor Uncle John," said Ruth, sadly, "he might have been so much happier. If he had only cared a little for us all, we might have made his life pleasanter."

"I think he was very well satisfied with things just as they were," said the lawyer, with a rather grim smile. "We all have our own tastes, you know, Miss Ruth. But now, my dear child, I have something to tell you which I think will surprise you very much. Did you know that your uncle was a very rich man?"

"He told me he was poor, but from something you said I had an idea that it was not quite true."

"He has left something over two millions," said the lawyer, quietly.

Ruth gave a violent start, and began to tremble, though why she could scarcely have told.

"You know, Miss Ruth, that your uncle was in some respects a very singular man," Mr. Locke went on. "He had accumulated his fortune through the hard work of many years, and I think it hurt him to think of parting with it even in another world. He was continually

changing his will, leaving his money first to one institution and then to another. Once he decided to endow a hospital, but for some unaccountable reason he changed his mind. I think, to tell the truth, he was never quite happy. He knew he was treating his own family unfairly, and yet he could never make up his mind to do otherwise. Three months ago, shortly after your return from school, he made a will in which he left you the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, dividing the remainder of his estate among various charities."

Ruth gave a little gasp. One hundred thousand dollars! The sum seemed to her almost fabulous. What could she not do for Arthur and Nellie and the children with such a fortune at her command!

"Last week he destroyed that will. Why he did it I cannot tell, but I suppose he had taken some new crotchet into his head. He wrote me on Friday, telling me what he had done and making an appointment with me for Monday morning, when it was his intention to draw up a new will. The consequence is that he has died intestate."

"Died intestate," repeated Ruth; "that means that he has not left any will at all, doesn't it?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Then what—what becomes of all the money?"

"It goes to his nearest of kin, that is to you and your brother. It will be divided equally between you."

Two hours later Ruth was sitting alone in that same room, waiting, with clasped hands and a wildly beating heart, for Mr. Locke's return. The lawyer had gone, at her urgent request, to break the wonderful news to her brother and his family.

"You must tell them the truth about me, too," she had whispered, clinging nervously to the old lawyer's arm, "and, oh, Mr. Locke, please don't let them blame me very much. This is all so strange and sudden, it frightens me."

And Mr. Locke had smiled reassuringly and given her shoulder an encouraging pat.

But that had all happened ages and ages ago, and surely, surely, it must be time for the law-

yer's return, unless something had happened. "When I find that a person has deceived me, I have no further use for him." How those cruel words kept ringing in her ears. What if Arthur felt in that way, too! What if he refused to have anything to do with her! Oh, it was too dreadful; it could not be. If Arthur would not forgive her, and take her back, her heart would break, if, indeed, it was not broken already. With a stifled sob she sprang to her feet, and began restlessly pacing up and down.

A ring at the door-bell at last. Ruth paused in her walk and listened. She was trembling so that she could scarcely stand. There was a quick, firm step — certainly not Mr. Locke's — on the stairs; the door, which had been partly closed, was pushed open, and Arthur himself came into the room. One glance at Ruth's pale, quivering face, and then, without uttering a single word, he walked straight up to her, took her in his arms, and kissed her.

"You are sure you are not really angry with me, Arthur?"

The two were sitting on the sofa side by

side, Ruth holding her brother's hand fast in both of hers and looking up into his face with pleading eyes.

"Angry with you, little girl?" Arthur repeated, and although he tried to laugh, his voice was not quite steady. "What kind of a fellow do you take me for? I should like to know who could be angry with you. Do you ever stop to realize what you have done for us all? Locke has told us everything, and all I can say is, that you are the pluckiest girl I have ever heard of."

"But I deceived you, dear; I told you what was not true." Ruth's lip quivered, and the tears came again.

"Never mind about that," said Arthur, soothingly. "You acted for the best, I know, though of course you ought to have told me. Do you suppose that if we had known the truth, either Nellie or I would ever have let you take the position you did?"

"No, I don't," said Ruth, smiling through her tears, "and that was just why I did it."

"You must come home with me now," said Arthur; "Nellie is dying to see you. You can



have no idea of the state of excitement they are all in. The children have all been told the wonderful news that Miss Barry is really Auntie Ruth, and when I came away Bobby was turning somersaults all over the place. I left Percy Allen consoling Nellie, who seemed to be under the impression that she had been playing the part of cruel sister-in-law with a vengeance."

"Was Mr. Allen there?" Ruth asked with a nervous start.

"Yes, he dropped in just before Locke appeared. I believe he said he came to ask you to go to church with him."

Before leaving the house the brother and sister went softly into the silent bedroom, and stood looking down for a moment at the rigid, motionless figure on the bed.

"Poor old chap," said Arthur, regretfully, "I hope I haven't been too hard on him in my thoughts. Things have been pretty rough with us, Ruth, and there have been times when—but we won't talk about that now. I was young and hot-headed, and I daresay said things that I had no business to say. After all, he was my

father's only brother, and he did his duty by us when we were children."

Three-quarters of an hour later Arthur was opening the door of the little flat with his latch-key.

"Here she is, Nellie," he called joyfully. "I've brought her back for the punishment she deserves. Come and tell her what you think of her."

Nellie's arms were around her sister-in-law's neck in a moment, and she was laughing and crying both together.

"Oh, Ruth, how could you, how could you?" sobbed the good little woman. "When I think of how you have slaved for us, I feel so ashamed. And this was what you meant when you asked me this morning not to be very angry with you. As if I could be, you dear, and yet what a dreadful fraud you have been. I declare, when I think of it all, I feel as if I should like to shake you."

"Marjorie," said Ruth, when the first excitement had somewhat subsided, and she had gone to her room to take off her hat, accompanied by her little niece, "your father said

Mr. Allen was here this morning. Has he gone away?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, "he went away a little while before you came back with Dada. Muzzie wanted him to stay to dinner, but he said he couldn't. I think he had a headache."

"Why, did he say he had one?"

"No," said the child, slowly, the old look coming into her face, "he didn't say anything about it, but he looked that way. Miss Barry — Auntie Ruth, I mean, does Uncle Percy have business like Dada?"

"Not exactly; he paints pictures, you know."

"Well," said Marjorie, with decision, "I'm sure it was business that made his head ache to-day. His eyes looked just the way Dada's did the day the firm failed. Auntie Ruth, Muzzie says Dada's business won't make his head ache any more, and that by and by we shall all go to the country. Do you think we really shall?"

"Yes, darling, I am sure of it. Now run away, like a good girl; Auntie Ruth wants to be alone for a little while."

"Does your head ache, too?" the child

asked, looking anxiously up into her aunt's pale face.

"Yes, a little."

"Ladies don't ever have business, do they?"

"Sometimes they do."

"Do you feel sorry because Uncle John has gone to heaven? We never heard about him till to-day, so we can't miss him very much, can we?"

"No, I don't suppose you can," said Ruth, smiling in spite of herself. "I used to know him very well, though, and he was good to me when I was a little girl. Now run along, my pet, and tell Dada and Muzzie I am coming in a few minutes."

## CHAPTER XII

### UNDER CHANGED CONDITIONS

"**A**UNTIE RUTH, I don't like nurses at all."

Bobby made the announcement in a tone of decided conviction, and his words were followed by a long sigh. Ruth laughed and threw down her book.

"What's the matter now, Bobby?" she inquired, lifting her little nephew into her lap as she spoke. Bobby was wearing a white sailor suit, and his face and hands were in an immaculate condition.

"It's Mary," said Bobby, mournfully, "she's so very fussy. She's always washing our hands and brushing our hair, and she won't let us dig after we're dressed for the afternoon. Frank and me don't like it. We never dressed for the afternoon when we were in New York."

Ruth glanced out of the window at the waving tree-tops, and caught a glimpse of the distant mountains. The air was heavy with the fragrance of new-mown hay.

"Surely, Bobby dear, you like this beautiful place better than New York."

Bobby looked doubtful.

"I like the hotel," he admitted, "'cause there's always ice cream every day, and lots of people to play with. I like driving and—well, and some other things, but we did have good times in New York, too, and nobody fussed about dressing up."

"Bobby is a very silly little boy," observed Marjorie, entering her aunt's room at that moment; "he doesn't appreciate his advantages." Marjorie was also arrayed in snowy white, and not a curl was out of place.

"I love to wear pretty clothes, and be clean," she added virtuously. "All the little girls at the hotel wear pretty clothes, and some day Dada is going to buy me a ring just like Gladys Raymond's. I shouldn't like to go back to the flat at all, should you, Auntie Ruth?"

"I don't know," said Ruth, rather absently.

"We had some good times in the flat, after all, didn't we, Bobby?"

"Yes, we did," returned Bobby, heartily. "We didn't have horrid old nurses then, and we only had to wash our hands before dinner."

"I am sure Mary is a very kind person," reproved Marjorie, with a shake of her curls, "and, besides, all rich children have nurses. We're rich children now, you know, Bobby; Mary says we are."

"Well, I like being poor children best," Bobby maintained. "Poor children have more fun. Oh, here comes Muzzie. Muzzie, can't Frank and me dig with our white suits on?"

"No, dear, certainly not. You must go and take a nice quiet walk with Mary. To-morrow morning you shall dig as much as you like. Now run along, darlings; Frank is ready, and Mary is waiting for you."

"Poor little fellow," said Ruth, laughing, as the disgusted Bobby left the room, followed by his virtuous sister; "the burden of riches seems to weigh heavily upon him."

"It doesn't trouble Marjorie, at any rate," answered Nellie, throwing herself into the com-

fortable rocker by the window ; " she adapts herself to our altered circumstances as readily as a fish takes to water. I have just been superintending the twins' afternoon repast, much to Hannah's disgust. She cannot seem to understand what interest a mother can possibly take in her own children. She tells me that Mrs. Irving, the lady she lived with before she came to us, never saw her baby but once a day. I told her I was sorry if she didn't like it, but that I never intended to allow any one to look after my babies' food but myself. She looked rather offended, but I think I have made her understand."

Ruth laughed.

" Good for you, Nellie ; riches will never turn you into a worldly mother, that's one sure thing."

A slightly troubled look crept into Nellie's sweet face.

" I don't know," she said more seriously ; " I am so happy that sometimes I am almost frightened. I don't think any one, even Arthur, fully realizes all that this great change means to me. All my life I have been poor. Why, I



cannot remember a time when I have not had to stop and consider before spending a dollar. Oh, Ruth, it's so wonderful, I feel sometimes as if it couldn't be true."

Ruth bent forward impulsively and kissed her.

"It is all true," she said cheerfully, "and you deserve every bit of it, too."

"When I see Arthur looking so happy and so well, and know that even if anything were to happen to me, the children would be all right," Nellie went on, with tears in her eyes, "why, I am sometimes afraid that I am not half good enough to deserve it all. I used to worry so, Ruth, especially when I was ill, thinking of what would become of the children if I should die, and Arthur couldn't afford to hire the right sort of person to take care of them. I think even little Marjorie worried sometimes. Have you noticed how much more childlike she seems?"

"Yes, indeed, and Arthur looks ten years younger, and you ten times prettier," laughed Ruth. "And now if we are going to make calls this afternoon, don't you think we had better be getting ready?"

"Yes, I suppose so, though I must confess I should much prefer sitting quietly here, it is so warm. Still, I suppose returning calls is one of the social duties required by our altered position. I never made a call in New York. I sometimes ran in to spend a half-hour with Mrs. Richards after the children were all in bed."

"People here have certainly been very kind," said Ruth. "I was counting up this morning, and I believe every family in the place has called."

"When we were here two summers ago, and boarded at the Applebys' farm, the Allens were the only people who took the slightest notice of us," observed Nellie, rising from her comfortable seat with evident reluctance. "Now that we have one of the hotel cottages to ourselves, and it is known that Arthur has inherited a fortune, people can't do enough for us. O dear, I am afraid nothing will ever make a society woman of me, but we must be polite, I suppose. I like the Allens, at any rate; they are genuine, if the others are not. They were just as kind, and showed us just

as much attention when Arthur was earning a salary of twelve hundred a year as they are now."

Mrs. Campbell went away to her own room to dress, without noticing the sudden color that had flamed up in her sister-in-law's cheeks at the mention of their neighbors.

Half an hour later the two ladies were walking leisurely along the shady village street of East Riverton, for it was to East Riverton they had come to spend the summer, and already, on this warm July afternoon, they had been established in their pretty cottage for several weeks.

"I think we may as well go to the rectory first," said Nellie. "The sun is so very hot, and if we make our call there first, it may be a little cooler for our walk. We might have taken a carriage from the hotel, but somehow I never thought of it."

"You never do think much about the luxuries of life," said Ruth, smiling.

"No, I don't suppose I do. Arthur says I must have my own carriage next winter, though. Just think of my having a carriage. The very idea almost takes away my breath."

"I suppose we shall be sure to find some of

the Allens at home," Ruth observed somewhat irrelevantly, as they came in sight of the church and the pretty vine-covered rectory.

"Oh, yes, I think so. That poor May is such an invalid, and Mrs. Allen and Dorothy are so devoted to her that they seldom leave her alone. I must ask May to go for another drive to-morrow. Oh, Ruth, isn't it delightful to be able to do things for other people?"

"Very," assented Ruth, a little absently.

"You know they are expecting Percy next week," Nellie went on. "He must have had a delightful trip. Arthur says we shall go abroad sometime, but I tell him there is no hurry about that."

"I suppose it is true that when a thing is within our grasp, it never seems quite so attractive as when we have to think and plan about it," said Ruth, and there was a note of bitterness in her voice. "I used to think the height of my ambition would be reached if I could see London and Switzerland, and now that I know I can see them whenever I choose, half the glamour is gone, and I feel as if I didn't really care very much."

Nellie looked a little troubled.

"You ought not to talk in that way at your age, Ruth," she said. "I am ten years older than you, and yet I am sure none of the glamour of life has worn off for me. I feel sometimes as if I could dance for pure joy, when I think of all the blessings that have come to us. You seem to have grown so old and wise all at once. I sometimes think you don't half appreciate your good fortune."

"Perhaps I don't," Ruth admitted with a sigh. "The responsibility of being an heiress seems so tremendous. Suppose I shouldn't make the best and wisest use of my money."

"Nonsense; a girl of eighteen has no business to bother her head about such things. When Marjorie is eighteen, I hope she will just have a good time and never bother about anything. I never had much fun when I was a girl, and I suppose that is the reason why I want other girls to have just as much pleasure as they possibly can. The cares of life come soon enough to every one. I shall get Percy to talk to you when he comes home. He is so clever and sensible he is sure to laugh you out of

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your worries. By the way, you have never seen him since we found out who you really were, have you?"

"No," said Ruth, in a very low voice.

"I remember he was with us when Mr. Locke brought the wonderful news, but he had left before you came home. Then you were out when he came that afternoon to tell us that he had decided to sail the very next day, in order to join those artist friends of his in Paris. It did seem rather sudden, but then he had always said he should go abroad just as soon as he sold one of his pictures."

At that moment they entered the rectory gate.

"There are at least three members of the family on the piazza," said Nellie, as they walked up the gravelled path to the house. "How comfortable they look, too! The Allens certainly are devoted to each other."

The three figures seated on the rectory piazza certainly did form a rather attractive group. Mrs. Allen, a middle-aged woman, with a sweet, motherly face, was reading aloud. Dorothy, the eldest daughter, a rather pretty

girl of nineteen, was busy with some fancy work. And May, the invalid, a pale, sickly-looking child, several years younger than her sister, lay back in the hammock, supported by pillows.

"This is really delightful," Mrs. Allen exclaimed in a tone of genuine pleasure, as she rose to greet her guests. "We scarcely expected that any one would have sufficient courage to venture out for a walk in this heat. You must be tired and nearly melted. Dorothy dear, run and ask Maggie to bring us some cold lemonade. Now take this rocker, Mrs. Campbell; you will find it more comfortable than that other chair."

"It really is dreadful weather," May remarked in a rather fretful tone, as the visitors seated themselves, and Mrs. Campbell drew her chair up beside the hammock.

"I daresay it seems warm to you," said Nellie, smiling, "but it is really quite cool compared with our usual summer weather in New York. I suppose we judge most things by contrasts. I remember I used to think, during that frightful heat last summer, that if I had

news yet. We received a telegram from Percy this morning, dated New York, telling us that he arrived last evening, a whole week sooner than we expected him."

"How very nice!" exclaimed Nellie. Ruth said nothing, and hoped devoutly that Dorothy Allen, who appeared to be a rather observant young person, would not notice the heightened color in her cheeks.

"Indeed it is nice," Mrs. Allen agreed. "Just think, I haven't seen my boy in more than six months. He went off in such a hurry that he had not time to come and bid us good-by."

"I suppose he has had a very pleasant trip," Ruth said a little stiffly. She felt that if she did not say something, Percy's mother would think her cold and unsympathetic.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. He hasn't said as much about it in his letters as I expected he would, but of course he has enjoyed it."

"It seems rather strange that he should decide at the last moment to come home a week sooner," remarked Dorothy, with a rather peculiar smile, "but I suppose his friends, the Carringtons, had something to do with it."



didn't say in the telegram, but I hope he will be here to-morrow."

"I hope so, too," chimed in Dorothy, "for I want him for my tennis party on Saturday. Dr. Wallace went to New York yesterday to meet Priscilla, so I suppose he will bring her home to-night. I want you to meet Priscilla, Miss Ruth, I am sure you will like her. By the way, you know I am counting on you both for Saturday afternoon."

Nellie declined on the plea that she did not play tennis. "Ruth plays, though," she added; "I heard her tell my husband so yesterday."

Ruth admitted that she had played a little at school, and Dorothy declared that she must not on any account disappoint them.

"This is such a lazy town," she grumbled; "it is even difficult to get up a tennis party, and I do want things to be as bright and pleasant as possible while Percy is here."

"Nellie," said Ruth, suddenly, as they were walking down the path to the rectory gate, "I have a bad headache coming on. Would you mind if I went home and left you to make the other calls by yourself?"

Nellie regarded her sister-in-law in evident astonishment.

"You do look badly," she said in a tone of real concern. "You are dreadfully white; I think it must be the heat. You had better go home and lie down, but don't you want me to go with you?"

"Oh, no, indeed, I would much rather go alone. I shall be all right in an hour or two; my headaches never last long."

But Nellie still looked doubtful.

"If you are sure you don't need me, I suppose I may as well go to the Wallaces'," she said. "Mrs. Wallace was very kind, and it is more than a week since she called. I can explain that you have a bad headache, and will come another day."

"Yes, do, please, dear, and don't hurry home on my account, for I think I will try to get a nap. I shall be quite myself again by supper-time."

To be alone, to hide herself where no one could see her, and then to let her feelings have their way for a time,—that was Ruth's one thought as she hurried along through the

broiling sun, in the direction of the hotel. In her preoccupation she did not even think of crossing the street and walking in the shade.

"And I must meet him, I must meet him very soon," she kept repeating to herself, "and act as if nothing had happened — as if I didn't care. Oh, if I could only go away somewhere before he comes. I don't suppose girls can travel about by themselves, though, and Arthur and Nellie wouldn't understand. He might think that I was running away from him, too, and that would be worse than anything. No, I must stay and face it; I must even meet that Wallace girl, and be polite to her, I suppose."

"Auntie Ruth, oh, Auntie Ruth, I'm so glad we've found you. Something dreadful has happened."

At the sound of the familiar little voice, Ruth turned with a start. Marjorie, the picture of distress, with tears streaming down her cheeks, was running toward her across the road, closely followed by Mary, the nurse, leading little Frank by the hand. Bobby was nowhere to be seen.

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"It's about Bobby," Marjorie explained breathlessly, seizing her aunt's hand; "he's been so terribly naughty, and now he's gone off to New York all by himself."

"Gone back to New York! Marjorie, what are you talking about?"

"Yes, it's quite true," insisted Marjorie, with a sob. "You know Bobby never does mind very well, and this afternoon he was 'specially bad. He didn't like it because Mary wouldn't let him play in the dirt after he was dressed, and he kept kicking the dust up all over her, until she was very angry, and then she slapped him. Nobody ever slapped Bobby before except Dada, and it made him very bad indeed. He kicked Mary, and wouldn't speak to her all the way home. Mary and Frank went into the house, but Bobby and I stayed out on the piazza, and then Bobby said he was going back to New York on the train all by himself. I told him the flat was all shut up, but he said he didn't care, he was going to stay with Mrs. Richards, and she wouldn't make him wear horrid white suits. I tried to coax him to be good, I truly did, Auntie Ruth, but he wouldn't

listen. He began walking away very fast, and I ran in to call Mary, and when we came out again we couldn't see Bobby anywhere."

"It's true, miss, every word of it," chimed in the nurse, who was looking both hot and indignant. "Of all the mischievous, troublesome children I've ever had the care of, that boy's the aggravatinnest."

"Which way did he go, Marjorie?" asked Ruth.

"I couldn't see, 'cause I ran to call Mary, but I think he knows the way to the station."

At that moment a loud, shrill whistle broke upon the still air. Marjorie clasped her hands in despair.

"It's a train," she wailed, "and Bobby's on it. He's such a little boy, he'll get run over and be killed. Oh, oh, oh!"

"Nonsense, Marjorie; stop crying like a good girl. See, you are making Frank cry, too. Bobby is all right. No one would let him get on a train by himself. Come, we'll all go to the station and bring him back."

But Marjorie and Frank were not so easily consoled, and Frank manifesting his grief by

sitting flat down on the sidewalk, his usual attitude when in great distress, Ruth left the two in Mary's charge, and started off alone in the direction of the station.

She was not very much frightened, realizing the improbability of anything having happened to the child in that quiet place. Still, Bobby was only five and a half, and there was the railroad track not a quarter of a mile away. She heard a train leaving the station, and her heart sank with a sudden fear. What if Bobby should have managed to get on board without being noticed? She had read of such things happening.

Suddenly she paused and stood still. Two figures, a tall young man and a very dusty little boy in a sailor suit, were approaching rapidly in her direction. The young man was holding the little boy's hand, and they were apparently engaged in animated conversation.

"There's Auntie Ruth," shouted the small boy, catching sight of the figure standing by the roadside. "Auntie Ruth, here's Uncle Percy. He just got off the train, and I saw

"Were they obliged to come home sooner?" Nellie inquired with interest.

"Yes, I believe so, and I suppose they persuaded Percy to sail with them. Priscilla Wallace was with them, too. I wonder if that fact hadn't something to do with Percy's change of plans."

"Who is Priscilla Wallace?" Nellie asked.

"Dr. Wallace's eldest daughter; an awfully nice girl she is, too. It seems the Carringtons wanted some one to go with them and teach their little girls, and Percy recommended Priscilla. Her father says she has had a lovely time, and is devoted to the whole Carrington family."

"Percy always seemed to like Priscilla better than any other girl here," observed May. "I wonder if he really has fallen in love with her."

Mrs. Allen said, "My dear May!" in a rather shocked tone, but Dorothy laughed.

"You know you would like it, mother, just as much as the rest of us," she declared. "You ~~are~~ always saying you wish Percy had a good life."

"Well, I suppose every mother would like

to see her son happily married," Mrs. Allen admitted with a smile. "Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Campbell?"

"My sons have scarcely reached the marriageable age as yet," Nellie answered, smiling, "so perhaps I am not qualified to express an opinion on the subject. I should like to see Percy happily married, though," she added in a different tone, "for I think he deserves a good home and a good wife, if any man in this world does."

"No woman ever had a better son," said Mrs. Allen, simply, and there were actually tears in her eyes.

Just then the maid appeared with lemonade and cake, and the conversation drifted to other subjects. What they were, Ruth could never afterward remember. She knew that she had listened, and answered, and even made a few voluntary remarks herself, but on what subject she could not have told had her life depended on it. Percy's name was not again mentioned until just as the visitors were leaving. Then Nellie asked when he was expected.

"We are not sure," Mrs. Allen said. "He



didn't say in the telegram, but I hope he will be here to-morrow."

"I hope so, too," chimed in Dorothy, "for I want him for my tennis party on Saturday. Dr. Wallace went to New York yesterday to meet Priscilla, so I suppose he will bring her home to-night. I want you to meet Priscilla, Miss Ruth, I am sure you will like her. By the way, you know I am counting on you both for Saturday afternoon."

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"Yes, it's quite true," insisted Marjorie, with a sob. "You know Bobby never does mind very well, and this afternoon he was 'specially bad. He didn't like it because Mary wouldn't let him play in the dirt after he was dressed, and he kept kicking the dust up all over her, until she was very angry, and then she slapped him. Nobody ever slapped Bobby before except Dada, and it made him very bad indeed. He kicked Mary, and wouldn't speak to her all the way home. Mary and Frank went into the house, but Bobby and I stayed out on the piazza, and then Bobby said he was going back to New York on the train all by himself. I told him the flat was all shut up, but he said he didn't care, he was going to stay with Mrs. Richards, and she wouldn't make him wear horrid white suits. I tried to coax him to be good, I truly did, Auntie Ruth, but he wouldn't

listen. He began walking away very fast, and I ran in to call Mary, and when we came out again we couldn't see Bobby anywhere."

"It's true, miss, every word of it," chimed in the nurse, who was looking both hot and indignant. "Of all the mischievous, troublesome children I've ever had the care of, that boy's the aggravatinnest."

"Which way did he go, Marjorie?" asked Ruth.

"I couldn't see, 'cause I ran to call Mary, but I think he knows the way to the station."

At that moment a loud, shrill whistle broke upon the still air. Marjorie clasped her hands in despair.

"It's a train," she wailed, "and Bobby's on it. He's such a little boy, he'll get run over and be killed. Oh, oh, oh!"

"Nonsense, Marjorie; stop crying like a good girl. See, you are making Frank cry, too. Bobby is all right. No one would let him get on a train by himself. Come, we'll all go to the station and bring him back."

But Marjorie and Frank were not so easily consoled, and Frank manifesting his grief by

sitting flat down on the sidewalk, his usual attitude when in great distress, Ruth left the two in Mary's charge, and started off alone in the direction of the station.

She was not very much frightened, realizing the improbability of anything having happened to the child in that quiet place. Still, Bobby was only five and a half, and there was the railroad track not a quarter of a mile away. She heard a train leaving the station, and her heart sank with a sudden fear. What if Bobby should have managed to get on board without being noticed? She had read of such things happening.

Suddenly she paused and stood still. Two figures, a tall young man and a very dusty little boy in a sailor suit, were approaching rapidly in her direction. The young man was holding the little boy's hand, and they were apparently engaged in animated conversation.

"There's Auntie Ruth," shouted the small boy, catching sight of the figure standing by the roadside. "Auntie Ruth, here's Uncle Percy. He just got off the train, and I saw

him. He's brought me home something fine, but he won't tell me what it is."

"Bobby, what do you mean by running away by yourself and frightening every one?" Ruth was thankful for the excuse of fixing her stern gaze on her little nephew, and so for the moment avoiding the glance of Bobby's companion.

Bobby hung his head.

"Mary slapped me," he said sullenly; "I don't like nurses. I want to go back to New York and live in the flat."

"You are a very naughty boy," said Ruth, severely; "you ought to be punished. Where did you find him, Mr. Allen?"

"At the station. I was just stepping off the train when I was hailed by a shout of recognition and saw Bobby dancing up and down on the platform. I did not know his being there was an act of insubordination."

Percy spoke quietly, but Ruth noticed that he was rather pale, and that his manner was not quite as self-possessed as usual. The meeting was evidently an embarrassing one to him as well as to herself, and for the moment she felt

almost thankful to Bobby, for having, by his naughtiness, furnished a subject of conversation. They shook hands then, Percy made some commonplace remark about the weather, and in another moment they were walking on side by side, Ruth holding the reluctant Bobby firmly by the hand.

"Your mother will be surprised to see you so soon," Ruth said, feeling that she must keep up the conversation. "Nellie and I have just been there, and they don't expect you before to-morrow."

"I thought I would take them by surprise," the young man answered, and Ruth felt sure his voice sounded cold and formal. "I sailed a week sooner than I intended. Some friends of mine, the Carringtons, were coming, and they persuaded me to take the same steamer."

At that moment a carriage, containing an elderly gentleman and a young girl, passed them. Percy took off his hat, and Ruth recognized the gentleman as Dr. Wallace, whom she had met several times. The girl she had never seen before. She must be his daughter Priscilla.



"He came up in the same train with her," she said to herself, and swallowed hard, to choke down the great lump in her throat which seemed to be threatening to strangle her. Meanwhile, Percy was saying politely:—

"Campbell wrote me he had decided to bring you all up here for the summer. I hope you like East Riverton."

"Oh, yes, I like it very much; the people are all so kind and pleasant. We have a cottage to ourselves, but we take our meals at the hotel. Bobby, stop kicking up the dust in that way."

"There appears to be at least one person who doesn't altogether appreciate his altered circumstances," observed Percy, with a rather amused glance at Bobby's sullen face.

Ruth would have liked to say, "There are two," but she checked herself in time, and only clutched Bobby's hand a little tighter. Had he been so very naughty, after all, she wondered. What would she herself not have given for the old happy life in the crowded little flat? Percy Allen had never addressed her in that cold, formal tone then. There was

a little more desultory conversation, and then they reached the turning which led to the rectory.

"Good afternoon," said Percy, lifting his hat courteously. "Tell the others I will be around to see them in the morning. I must spend this first evening with my people. Good-by, Bobby, my man; better not try any more experiments in running away."

"Auntie Ruth," said Bobby, as they walked on together towards the hotel, "do you think you will have to tell Dada?"

Ruth hesitated.

"Will you promise never, never to do such a naughty thing again, Bobby?"

Bobby nodded.

"And will you tell Mary you are sorry you kicked her?"

"Ye-es," said Bobby, reluctantly, "but I don't like nurses," he added under his breath.

"Then I won't tell Dada, but Muzzie will have to know on account of your suit. Oh, Bobby, how could you get yourself into such a dreadful state? You look as if you hadn't been washed for a week."

"I rolled in the dirt," Bobby admitted with downcast eyes. "I hate white suits and always having my face washed. Oh, Auntie Ruth," he added, with a break in his voice, "I don't like being rich people half as much as being poor ones. I do wish we were poor people again, and didn't have any horrid old nurses."

"I wish it, too, Bobby," said Ruth, but she spoke so low that Bobby did not hear the words.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ALLENS' TENNIS PARTY

“**A**RE you ready, Ruth?”  
“Yes, I suppose I am.”

It was Saturday afternoon, and Ruth, dressed for the Allens' tennis party, was standing at the door of her sister-in-law's room. There was a note of weariness in the girl's voice, but Nellie regarded her with evident satisfaction.

“That hat is very becoming to you, Ruth,” she remarked in a tone of approval. “Altogether, you look very ‘fit’ as Percy used to say. I hope you will have a good time.”

“I wish I were not going,” said Ruth, with a sigh. “It's too hot for tennis, and that book you brought home from the library yesterday is very interesting.”

“Nonsense,” returned Mrs. Campbell, a little impatiently. “The idea of a girl of your age preferring a novel to a tennis party. I really

mean it, Ruth, when I say that you don't appreciate your advantages. I daresay you are at this moment the envy of every girl in East Riverton."

Ruth tried to laugh, but the attempt was rather a failure.

"I am sure I don't want to be the envy of any one," she said crossly. "There, Nellie, don't mind me; I know I haven't been one bit nice lately. I suppose I am being spoiled by too much luxury."

"I don't believe you are well, and that is what is making you blue," declared Nellie, with conviction. "You are beginning to feel the reaction from all your hard work. You haven't looked really well since we came here. Arthur has noticed it, too, and Percy asked me last evening if you had been ill."

"I hope you told him I was perfectly well."

"I said you had never complained, but that Arthur and I were afraid the mountain air didn't altogether agree with you."

"What did he say?" Ruth was very busy buttoning her glove, and consequently did not raise her eyes as she asked the question.

"He said this mountain air was too strong to suit some people, and that you ought to go to the sea-shore for a change, for he considered that you were looking very badly."

"I don't want to go to the sea-shore," said Ruth, "but, Nellie, there is somewhere I should like to go very much."

"Where is that?" Nellie inquired in surprise.

"To Chicago, to visit Miss Molton and Madam. I had a letter from Miss Molton this morning, and she seems very anxious to have me. I was going to talk to you and Arthur about it this evening."

"You couldn't take that long journey by yourself," Nellie objected. "I suppose Arthur would say you might take a maid with you, but do you really think you would like it?"

"I am sure I should. The Moltons are very dear old friends, and you know I have spent every summer with them since I was ten. I should like to see some of my other Chicago friends, too."

"Well, you'll have to talk to Arthur about it, but I should be dreadfully sorry to have you

leave us. I was in hopes you were going to have such a pleasant summer here."

There was real regret in Nellie's tone, and, with a sudden pang of remorse, Ruth went up to her and kissed her.

"You are a dear," she said a little unsteadily, "and I don't deserve half of all you are doing for me. I believe I am turning out an ungrateful wretch."

"You're nothing of the kind," laughed Nellie, her own good nature at once restored, as she returned Ruth's kiss with affection. "Now run along, for you are shockingly late. Dorothy Allen said you must be sure to come by four, and it's nearly half-past already. Tell Percy to come over and dine with us to-morrow."

"What are you going to do yourself this afternoon?" Ruth asked as she turned to leave the room.

"Arthur has engaged a six-seated buckboard, and we are going to take all the children, including the twins, for a drive."

"I hope we are not going to have a thunderstorm; the air feels so sultry."



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"Oh, I think not," and Nellie glanced out at the blazing afternoon sunshine. "It won't come before night, anyway. Now don't dawdle any longer, that's a good girl. You will be sure to have a good time when you get there."

There was quite a gathering of young people on the rectory tennis court, but as Ruth approached along the gravelled walk, Dorothy Allen, who was flitting about among her guests like an animated butterfly, caught sight of her at once, and came hurrying forward to meet her.

"How late you are!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "We are just making up a set; don't you want to join?"

"I would much rather sit and look on," Ruth protested earnestly. "I haven't played in more than a year, and I am dreadfully out of practice."

"Very well, then, you can look on at this set, but you must play in the next. Every one is playing this afternoon, even father. He declared he was too old, but Priscilla Wallace and I fairly routed him out of his study, and

made him join. Oh, here's Priscilla. Priscilla dear, this is Miss Campbell. Won't you take her over to one of those benches under the trees? She says she would rather look on than play. They are all waiting for me, and I must hurry."

Away flew Dorothy, and Ruth found herself shaking hands with a tall girl in blue, who was regarding her with an expression of considerable interest. She was not a strikingly pretty girl, but she had a bright, sensible face, and a pleasant voice, and Ruth knew at once that this was the Priscilla for whose sake Percy had shortened his vacation by a whole week.

"I am so glad to meet you, Miss Campbell," the girl said, leading the way to a bench under the shade of a large apple tree. "I have heard so much about you ever since I came home."

"Indeed," said Ruth, rather stiffly.

"Yes, every one in East Riverton is talking about you and your sister-in-law. You are looked upon as great acquisitions to the place, you know."

"No, I did not know," Ruth answered with a faint smile.

"Well, you are, and every one says you are both charming. I am particularly interested on account of your being such old friends of Percy's."

"My brother and his wife are old friends. I never met Mr. Allen until last winter." Ruth was wondering how much of her story Percy had already told Miss Priscilla Wallace.

"Well, Dorothy says your people were awfully good to Percy when he was alone in New York. I suppose you have heard it was all through Percy that I have had my delightful trip abroad this spring?"

They were seated on the bench, and Miss Wallace, who appeared to prefer conversation to tennis, had settled herself for a comfortable chat.

"I knew that you were travelling with friends of the Allens'," Ruth said, wishing that her voice would not sound so cold, but somehow finding it impossible to infuse any warmth into it.

"Yes, the Carringtons, — charming people. Mr. Carrington is an artist, and a great friend of Percy's, though some years older. They

wanted some one to go abroad with them, and teach their little girls, and Percý proposed me ; wasn't it splendid of him ? ”

“ Very,” Ruth assented shortly.

“ Of course we had known each other all our lives,” Priscilla went on, “ but I had scarcely seen anything of him since he went to New York to live, and I should never have dreamed of his remembering me. I wasn't his first choice, for Mrs. Carrington told me he had mentioned another girl,—a Miss Berry or Perry, I think her name was,—who was living as governess or companion with some friends of his, but she preferred to remain where she was. Then Percy suggested me, and you can imagine how delighted I was. To go abroad had been the dream of my life since I was a little girl.”

“ You liked the Carringtons, I suppose ? ” Somehow Ruth's heart did not feel quite so heavy as it had done a moment before. Miss Wallace had evidently no idea that she was talking to the girl who had “ preferred to remain where she was.” Percy had not told her story, after all, then.

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"Oh, yes, indeed; Mr. and Mrs. Carrington were just as nice and kind as they could be, and the children are darlings. Mrs. Carrington has asked me to make her a long visit in New York next winter."

At that moment Mrs. Allen, looking rather flushed and worried, approached the bench where the two girls were sitting, and Ruth rose to greet her hostess.

"How is May this afternoon, Mrs. Allen?" Priscilla asked when the clergyman's wife had shaken hands with Ruth.

"Not much better, I am afraid. It always takes her a day or two to recover from those severe attacks of pain. My daughter was ill last night, Miss Campbell, and she is in bed to-day and still feeling very poorly. It seems very unfortunate, as she has been looking forward with so much pleasure to this afternoon. She cannot play tennis herself, poor child, but she enjoys watching the game and talking to people."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Ruth, and there was plenty of warmth in her voice now. She had felt strangely drawn toward the invalid

girl, who suffered from a serious spinal disease, and whose white, drawn face told its own story of pain. "I wish I could do something for her. Do you think she would care to have me sit with her for a while?"

Mrs. Allen looked pleased.

"You are very kind, my dear," she said. "May would be delighted, I know, but I hate to have you lose any pleasure on her account."

Ruth hastened to explain that she did not intend to play, as she was out of practice, and that it would really give her pleasure to spend an hour with May. After a little more hesitation Mrs. Allen led the way to the house, Miss Wallace having in the meantime been carried off to take her part in a set.

"Polly is sitting with her now," Mrs. Allen said, as they went up the wide oak staircase to the second floor. "I was sorry to deprive her of any of the afternoon's amusement, but Dorothy and I are so busy, and May ought not to be left alone."

Polly, a girl of thirteen, and the youngest of the family, was sitting by her sister's bedside,

and as her mother and Ruth entered the invalid's room, she threw down the book she had been reading aloud, and sprang eagerly to her feet.

"May I go down now, mother?" she demanded anxiously. "May says she doesn't mind staying alone one bit."

May, who was lying with half-closed eyes, the poor thin face whiter and more drawn than ever, looked up at her sister's question.

"Oh, do let her go, mother," she said fretfully. "She does nothing but sigh all the time, and it makes me so nervous."

"Yes, you may go, Polly," Mrs. Allen said. "May dear, here is Miss Campbell come to see you."

May raised herself on one elbow, and held out her hand with a faint smile.

"May I stay with you for a little while?" Ruth asked, taking the hot little hand in her strong, cool one. "I should like to very much, if you don't mind."

"I should like it ever so much," said May, her pale face brightening perceptibly.

The matter being thus settled, Mrs. Allen and Polly hurried away, the former promising



to return in a short time, and Ruth seated herself by the invalid's bedside, prepared to make herself either useful or agreeable, as occasion might demand.

"Shall I read to you?" she inquired, noticing the book which Polly had thrown face downward on the bed.

"No, thank you. Mother and Dorothy took turns reading to me all the morning, and Percy read for an hour after lunch. Do they seem to be having a good time?"

"Yes, I should think they were. Almost every one was playing when I came in. Even your father was in the midst of a set."

"It was awfully good of you to leave it all and come up here to sit with me," said May, gratefully.

"No, it wasn't. I much prefer sitting here to playing tennis in that broiling sun."

May smiled.

"It's funny, isn't it?" she remarked thoughtfully, "that the things people can't do they always want to, and the things they can they don't seem to care much about. Now if I were only strong enough to play tennis, I am

sure I should never mind the hot sun or anything else."

Ruth laughed, but she was touched by the girl's evident longing for the simple pleasures of which she herself had tired.

"I suppose it is human nature to sigh for what we haven't got, and then not appreciate it when it is within our grasp," she said. "A year ago I thought that to go abroad was the one wish of my life. Now I know that I can go whenever I choose, and I don't seem to care very much about it."

"My brother has just come back from Europe, you know," said May. "He must have had a lovely time. You have met him, haven't you, Miss Campbell?"

"Oh, yes."

"Don't you like him very much?"

"Yes, very much indeed."

"He is such a dear, good fellow, and we are all so proud of him. Have you seen any of his pictures?"

"Yes, we — that is my sister-in-law and I — went to his studio once last winter. They are beautiful, I think."

"I am sure he will be a great artist some day," said May, with conviction. "He had rather a hard time at first, but people are beginning to appreciate him now. He has sold two pictures already this year. Did you meet Priscilla Wallace this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Ruth, shortly.

"You know she and Percy are great friends. Dorothy hopes they will be engaged some day, but I don't. I like Priscilla when I am feeling pretty well,—she is awfully kind, you know, and all that,—but when my back aches she tires me dreadfully. She is very good-natured, but so noisy and bustling."

Before Ruth could answer there was a tap at the door, and in answer to May's "Come in" it opened, and Percy appeared on the threshold with a glass of lemonade in one hand and a plate of frosted cakes in the other.

"I've brought you some refreshments, May," he began. "Why, Miss Bar — Miss Campbell, I mean,—this is indeed a surprise."

"Miss Campbell has come to sit with me," May explained, as her brother paused in evident embarrassment; "wasn't it kind of her?"

"Very kind, indeed," returned the young man, recovering himself not without an effort. "I saw you arrive, Miss Campbell, but I was in the midst of a set, and when I looked about for you afterward, you were nowhere to be seen."

He spoke courteously, as he always did, but there was the same air of restraint and embarrassment in his manner which Ruth had noticed on the day of his return, and which had never been absent from it since, although they had necessarily met several times. She made an effort to reply in her natural voice, however, and Percy, who did not seem in any particular hurry, sat down in a chair by the window, while May sipped her lemonade and nibbled her cakes.

"Have you and Priscilla been playing in the same set, Percy?" May inquired rather mischievously.

"We played in one set together."

"I was just asking Miss Campbell if she had met Priscilla, and she said she had."

"Yes, and Miss Wallace seems a very charming girl," put in Ruth. Her heart was beating

uncomfortably fast, and she was horribly afraid that her voice trembled, but she made an effort to speak with unusual cheerfulness and animation.

"She is a charming girl," Percy agreed heartily.

"She has been telling me about her trip," Ruth went on. "You must have both had a delightful time."

"Miss Wallace certainly appeared to enjoy it, and as I was visiting places I have been longing to see since I was a boy, I ought to have been satisfied, I suppose."

"I don't believe you half appreciated it, though," observed May, discontentedly. "People never do appreciate things. I was saying so to Miss Campbell only a few moments ago, when she told me she preferred staying up here to playing tennis in the hot sun."

At that moment there was a second tap at the door; Percy rose to open it, and this time it was Priscilla Wallace, looking both flushed and breathless, who presented herself.

"Oh, here you are, Percy," she exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction. "I've been looking for

you all over the house. Dorothy wants you and me to fill up a set, and she sent me to find you. Oh, May, I'm so sorry you can't come down. We're having a splendid time."

Priscilla did not intend to say anything in the least unkind, but she was not a very tactful young person, and it struck Ruth that her words sounded a little heartless. What Percy's opinion on the subject was she had no means of knowing, but she noticed that before he left the room he went over to May's bedside and bent down to kiss her.

"Cheer up, little woman," he said affectionately. "You'll be all right to-morrow, and we'll have a fine drive together. I've engaged the old bay horse for the afternoon."

May's face brightened.

"Oh, how good you are, Percy," she said. "I do love driving. Mrs. Campbell has taken me several times, and she has asked me to go again on Monday."

Percy looked pleased.

"Mrs. Campbell is a dear, thoughtful little woman," he said heartily; "but I must hurry or Miss Priscilla will lose patience. I shall see

and Mrs. Campbell. The thing was carried away in the case of the two-  
year-old child.

The next morning was a very pleasant one. May and I was not altogether surprised to find that after all there was some pleasure in the feeling that she was getting some of the pleasure and she knew herself as really and she was a husband and a child. But she soon had her morning over on account of a school lesson and learning with the interest in her account of Mrs. Campbell and Margaret. When Mrs. Campbell returned she found both girls smiling and May in fact looking extremely happy.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mrs. Campbell," she said immediately taking Kate's hand in hers. "You have done more than you can think of. But I don't know you sitting in your big chair, you must go down and have a little talk with the little ones."

Kate would have almost preferred waiting where she was for she felt that she could scarcely believe the fact without believing that she was and that promising May to come

again very soon and bidding her an affectionate good-by, obediently left the room.

"Oh, mother, I do like her so much," exclaimed May, as the door closed behind her visitor. "She has been so kind. I wish that Percy —"

Ruth heard no more as she hurried down the stairs, but her cheeks tingled, and she suddenly became aware of the fact that she was really growing very fond of May Allen.

On reaching the lawn the first objects to attract Ruth's attention were Percy Allen and Priscilla Wallace occupying the very bench under the apple tree where she and Priscilla had been sitting an hour earlier. They were evidently engaged in earnest conversation, or at least Priscilla was talking fast and eagerly, while Percy regarded her with an expression of deep interest on his kindly face. Neither of them saw Ruth as she approached noiselessly across the grass. Every one else seemed to be absorbed in the exciting game; even Polly had been drawn into a set, and Dorothy was deep in the midst of an exciting match.

Ruth stood still for a moment, uncertain what to do; nobody appeared to notice her.



"I will go home," she said to herself with sudden determination; "no one will care; no one even remembers I am here."

She turned resolutely toward the gate, and two minutes later was walking rapidly along the village street. At the corner she paused; the church clock was just striking six.

"I can't go home yet," she said; "it's too early. Nellie will ask questions." She had forgotten for the moment that her sister-in-law would be out driving and would consequently know nothing of her early return.

She reflected for a moment, and then decided to take a walk. She felt restless and nervous, and the thought of sitting still seemed impossible just then. She was fond of walking, and was already familiar with most of the roads about East Riverton.

"I'll take that pretty path through the woods," she decided. "It will be nice and cool there, and if I feel like it, I can sit down and rest for a while. I mustn't get home before seven."

This decision made, Ruth wasted no more time in reflection, but turned her steps toward

the woody path she remembered having taken once before. She had soon left the hot, dusty road behind her, and was walking along a shady foot-path, bordered on each side by large, overhanging trees.

It was very still in the woods. Even the birds twittered softly, as if afraid of making a noise, and scarcely a leaf stirred in the sultry air. This solitude was what the girl had been craving all the afternoon. To be alone, where nobody could see her, and then to let her feelings have their own way for a little while. It was such a comfort not to have to keep up appearances; to let those burning tears come pouring down her cheeks unrestrained. It was all over now. Any faint hope that she might have entertained that Percy might some day forgive her and believe in her again had been banished by that last glimpse of those two on the bench, oblivious of every one and everything besides themselves. And yet he had cared once, she knew he had. No one could have looked at her as Percy had done that day in the park who did not care. If only she had told him the truth then, he might—but, no,

he was so hard. Had he not said that if any-one had once deceived him, he had no further use for that person? And then she remembered Mr. Locke's quotation:—

“Oh, what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practise to deceive.”

Hers was indeed a “tangled web,” and what was worse, it seemed likely that it would go on being tangled all the rest of her life.

She took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. If she went home with red eyes, what would Nellie say? Nellie was so very observant. She was walking on aimlessly, paying no particular attention to where she went. She knew the path was straight and would bring her out at a point not far from home. But although straight, the path was not altogether free from impediments, and in her abstraction Ruth entirely failed to notice the large root of a tree lying directly across her way, until her foot came into sudden and violent contact with the unlooked-for obstacle. She tripped and tried to save herself, but in vain, and the next moment was lying prone upon the ground, with her left foot under her.

"What a goose I am," was her first reflection, as she struggled into a sitting posture. "It serves me right for not paying more attention to where I was going. Oh, my foot!"

With a sharp cry of pain she sank back, unable to rise. There was no need of any one to tell her what had happened, the fact was self-evident; she had sprained her ankle.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ALONE IN THE WOODS

**I**T was nearly half-past six when the Campbells returned from their drive, and already the twins were fast asleep in Nellie's lap, and little Frank was dozing, with his head on his father's shoulder. As soon as the children had been delivered over to the waiting nurses, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell hurried to their room to dress for supper. As she passed Ruth's door, Nellie noticed that the room was empty, and naturally concluded that her sister-in-law had not yet returned, but when seven o'clock came, and still the girl did not appear, she began to feel a little curious.

"Shall we wait for her?" Arthur inquired, as he and his wife stood on the piazza, ready for supper.

Nellie looked doubtful.

"I think she would rather we didn't wait,"

she said. "The Allens may have persuaded her to stay over there to supper, and in that case Percy will probably walk back with her afterward."

"She had better not stay too long if she wants to avoid a wetting," Arthur remarked, glancing at a heavy bank of clouds in the west. "We shall have a thunder-storm before the evening is over, or I am much mistaken."

When the Campbells returned from the hotel after supper, Ruth was still absent, and Nellie began to look a little anxious.

"Do you think we ought to go over to the rectory and find out if she is there?" she asked her husband, but Arthur, who had already settled himself comfortably on the piazza with his cigar, did not appear to think this at all necessary.

"She's all right," he maintained with cheerful conviction. "She has stayed at the rectory to supper, that's all. She and Percy will be along in a little while."

There was a short pause, while Arthur puffed away at his cigar, and Nellie mentally contrasted her present delightful surroundings to the noise

and heat of a summer evening in the city. She was the first to speak.

"I do hope Ruth will notice those clouds, and hurry home. She told me the other day that, although not afraid of many things, she had a perfect horror of thunder-storms. One of her schoolmates was struck by lightning some years ago, and she has never forgotten the circumstance."

"Percy will look after her all right," returned Arthur, carelessly. "By the way, Nell, didn't you have an idea that those two were getting fond of each other?"

"I did think so in the spring, but I scarcely know what to think now. Ruth never speaks of Percy if she can avoid it, and it did seem very strange his going away without coming to bid her good-by. She never said a word to me about it, but I know her feelings were hurt."

"Poor old Percy," said Arthur. "He has such high ideas about honor and all that sort of thing, I doubt that he would tell her even if he did care for her now, since she has inherited a fortune, and he has nothing but what he makes from his pictures."

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"Arthur, you don't mean that if Percy were really in love with Ruth, he wouldn't tell her so, just because of her money?" Nellie's tone was decidedly indignant.

"I do mean it," returned her husband, gravely. "The money would stand decidedly in the way of any love-making on Percy's part. He is the proudest fellow I have ever known. I really believe he would rather cut off his right hand than ask a rich girl to marry him."

"Then, suppose they really do care for each other, what is to be done? You surely don't think they ought to be allowed to spoil both their lives simply because Percy is too proud to ask the girl he loves, and who loves him, to marry him, because she happens to have more money than he has himself?"

Arthur laughed.

"I am afraid there would be only one way out of it," he said, laughing, "and that would be for Ruth to do the asking herself. But here they come; I see Percy crossing the street."

"It is Percy, but, oh, Arthur, where can Ruth be? She isn't with him."



For several minutes Ruth remained sitting with her back resting against a fallen tree trunk, feeling sick and faint, and more frightened than she could ever remember having felt before. She was alone in the woods. In all probability hours might elapse before another human being passed that way. None of her friends would have the least idea where to look for her, and it was already considerably after six o'clock. What was to be done? The pain in her foot seemed to be increasing every moment. With some difficulty she succeeded in unfastening her shoe, but when she attempted to stand, she found that her foot was in no condition for walking. The slightest attempt to move on it made her so faint with pain that she was thankful to sink down again, biting her lips to keep back a cry.

Manifestly there was but one thing to do. She must remain where she was until somebody found her. After all, it was very possible there might be other people besides herself in the woods, and if she called for help some one might hear her. So she raised her voice and shouted. There was no answer, and the echo

of her own voice among the trees sounded so strange and awesome that she shivered involuntarily, and decided to remain quiet until some sound should assure her that there was a likelihood that people were within hearing.

"When they find that I am not at home in time for supper, they will surely come to look for me," she said to herself, "and in the meantime nothing very dreadful is likely to happen to me here. I have simply got to wait as patiently as I can till something happens."

She drew off the shoe from her aching foot, and making herself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, prepared to await events. How deathly still it was! In the distance she could faintly catch the sound of running water, but not a leaf stirred. The evening was oppressively hot, but that fact was rather fortunate, she decided, as she was in no danger of taking cold, even in her thin muslin.

A long time passed. It might have been hours, or it might have been only minutes. Ruth had no means of telling, having left her watch at home. She reflected that in all probability the time seemed longer to her than it

really was, but even taking that fact into consideration, she felt sure it must be after seven o'clock. The possibility that Arthur and Nellie might suppose she had remained at the rectory to supper did not occur to her, and she concluded that when she did not arrive soon after seven, Arthur would start to look for her. Of course the rectory would be the first place where inquiries would be made, but the Allens would not be able to give any information about her. No one had seen her leave the tennis party; Dorothy was interested in her match, and Percy too much absorbed in other matters to pay any attention to her movements. But when it was discovered that she was really lost, then of course there would be a commotion. Arthur would institute a search party; but would Percy join it, or would Priscilla—nonsense! of course he would come; was he not Arthur's friend?

Her ankle ached and throbbed painfully, and she felt very tired and miserable. It might be hours and hours before they found her, for it could be only by the merest chance that they would happen to take the right path at once,

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and how frightened poor Nellie would be! But there was no use in letting her mind dwell on painful possibilities. She was utterly helpless, and if she allowed herself to grow nervous as well, she would only make matters worse.

"I will try to go to sleep," she decided practically, settling her head against the mossy stump. "I'm tired enough to sleep, goodness knows, and if I can manage to forget about things for a little while, the time won't seem so terribly long."

But it was one thing to decide to take a nap, and quite another to do it. The pain in her foot seemed to be growing worse instead of better, and as the evening advanced the mosquitoes began to make themselves more prominent than was at all agreeable. Ruth slapped vigorously at the little pests with her handkerchief, but they seemed to rejoice in their helpless victim, and at last, in sheer desperation, the poor girl's tears began to flow afresh.

"I never was so miserable in my life," she moaned. "I didn't know any one could be so miserable. Oh, how my foot aches, and how

those dreadful mosquitoes do sting! Will nobody ever come?"

Perhaps her cry did her good, for after a while she really did fall into a doze, from which she waked with a start, to find that it had grown very dark and that a fresh, cool breeze was blowing in her face.

"I wonder what time it is," was her first thought, as she raised herself into a sitting position and rubbed her eyes. "It has certainly grown much cooler. Oh, what's that?"

It was a low, rumbling sound, a sound unmistakable to Ruth's startled ears.

"It's thunder," she cried, speaking out loud in her sudden terror; "we're going to have a thunder-storm, and I'm all alone in these dreadful woods."

Ever since she was a child the sound of thunder had filled her with that same nervous terror. She had never forgotten one dreadful night when she had been awakened by a deafening crash that seemed to shake the house to its very foundations. The crash had been followed by wild screams, and the running of many feet. Some one had cried that the house was struck,

and Ruth, in a panic of terror, had sprung out of bed and rushed into the hall, there to find a scene of indescribable confusion. From the room opposite her own, which seemed to be full of a strange, sulphurous odor, Miss Molton was hurrying, carrying something in her arms. It was little Amy Ruthven, the youngest child in the school, and she was lying very still, with closed eyes, and a face so strangely drawn and white that Ruth had fled away in terror and hidden her head under the bedclothes of her own bed, too frightened to do anything but moan, with shaking limbs and chattering teeth. There Miss Molton had found her some time later, and had tried to comfort her by the assurance that Amy was not dead, and that the doctor hoped she would soon be better. But it was weeks before Ruth recovered from the shock, and ever since the sound of thunder had been horrible to her.

Now her first impulse was flight. To get away, out of those woods before the storm actually burst. It could not be far to the road, and she must manage it somehow, able or not able. The next moment she had scrambled

to her feet, but as the injured foot touched the ground she uttered an involuntary cry, and set her teeth hard.

"I must do it, I must," she said resolutely. "I can't get my shoe on, but I must manage without it."

Another and louder peal of thunder broke upon the stillness of the night, and the branches overhead began to sway in the rising wind. It was so dark that she could not see a foot before her, but she plunged blindly on. Every step was agony. A dozen, two dozen steps, and then—oh, that terrible faintness. Her head seemed spinning round and round; there was a strange, singing noise in her ears, and with a low moan, she fell forward on the path.

"Ruth, Ruth, what is it? Speak to me. Oh, my darling, are you hurt?"

With a queer feeling of bewilderment, Ruth opened her eyes. Some one was bending over her, supporting her head on one arm, while the other hand held a lantern. The rain was pouring in torrents.

"Percy," murmured Ruth, faintly; "oh, Percy, I was sure you would come to look for me."

"We have been looking everywhere for you," the young man said, and by the light of the lantern Ruth saw that his face was white, and that the rain was dripping from his clothes and hair. "We had no idea what had become of you. What has happened? Where are you hurt?"

"My foot," said Ruth, making a feeble effort to raise herself into a sitting position. "I fell and sprained my ankle. I couldn't walk home and I sat down to wait till some one found me. I waited a long time, and I think must have fallen asleep, for when I waked I heard thunder, and I was so frightened. I thought I must manage to get out of the woods before the storm, but my foot hurt so."

Just then there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a deafening peal of thunder, and with a scream of terror Ruth clutched her companion's arm.

"Don't be frightened; you are quite safe, and it isn't really a very bad storm."

There was unutterable relief to Ruth in the sound of those tender, reassuring words, and as if to add force to his assertion that she was



quite safe, the young man threw a strong arm protectingly around her.

"You are very wet," said Ruth, recovering her composure, and even trying to smile. "How did you find me?"

"We have been scouring the country for the past hour. The others are just behind, your brother and one of the porters from the hotel. We concluded that you had gone for a walk, and met with some accident. Let me put my coat around you. It's wet enough, I'm sorry to say, but it's better than nothing."

"Nonsense; I'm all right, and you will take cold without your coat." Ruth was trembling violently, but whether from cold or nervousness, it would be difficult to say.

"Here they come," exclaimed Percy, in a tone of relief. "I've found her, Campbell; hurry, this way."

There was a shout, and two more dripping figures, each carrying a lantern, appeared in sight. At the first glimpse of Arthur's kind face, Ruth's composure gave way again, and she burst into tears.

"You poor little girl!" Mr. Campbell said

tenderly, as his sister buried her face on his shoulder, with a sob, "you have had a hard time, and given us all a pretty fright as well. Don't cry; you're all right now. We've got a trap waiting just outside the woods, and we'll have you at home in fifteen minutes."

An hour later Ruth was in bed, the sprained ankle bathed and bandaged, and Nellie hanging over her, full of loving solicitude.

"You poor darling," she murmured, smoothing the girl's forehead with tender fingers; "what a dreadful experience it has been for you!"

"It was pretty dreadful," said Ruth, with a shudder, "especially when I heard the thunder; but then the relief when Arthur and the others came almost made up for everything."

"Did Arthur find you first," Nellie inquired, with interest, "or were they all together?"

"N-no," Ruth admitted, suddenly turning her face away from the light; "they had each taken a different path, it seems. I should have heard them calling me if I hadn't been such a

goose as to faint. It was Per — Mr. Allen, I mean, who found me.”

Nellie insisted on remaining in her sister-in-law's room that night, fearing that she might wake and need something, but long after Mrs. Campbell had fallen into a peaceful sleep, Ruth lay awake, with wide-open eyes.

“He does care, he does care,” she kept repeating over and over to herself, while her heart throbbed with a strange new joy. “He couldn't have looked at me like that if he hadn't, and he said ‘my darling.’ I must have been wrong about Priscilla, after all. He may never forgive me for having deceived him, but since I have seen that look in his eyes, nothing can ever again make me doubt that he really cares very much.”

## CHAPTER XV

### PERCY EXPLAINS

**I**T was three days later, and Ruth, the sprained ankle supported on a foot-stool, was lying back in the big steamer chair on the piazza. She had been reading, but her book had dropped into her lap, and she lay gazing dreamily away toward the mountains and listening to the twittering of a family of robins, which had made their nest in the apple tree close by. It was a lovely afternoon. The children were playing in the clover field back of the house, and the sound of their shrill little voices reached her every now and then, bringing a smile of satisfaction to her lips.

"Poor darlings," she said softly, "how happy they are, and what a contrast all this is to the poor little flat. I believe Nellie was right when she said I hadn't half appreciated my blessings."

The click of the gate caused her to turn her

head. Mrs. Campbell, in her best summer silk, and carrying a white lace parasol, was coming up the path.

"Well, have you had a pleasant time?" Ruth inquired, as her sister-in-law sank rather wearily into the chair by her side.

"It was rather warm, and I found two of the people out, but Mrs. Wallace was at home, and I had a very pleasant call there. By the way, I have a piece of news for you."

"I'm glad of that. I hope you didn't forget to thank Mrs. Wallace for that delicious jelly she sent me."

"No, I didn't, but listen to my news. Her eldest daughter is engaged to be married."

Ruth gave a violent start, and some of the color died out of her face, but Nellie went on, apparently not noticing her embarrassment.

"Mrs. Wallace told me all about it. It has only been announced to-day. He is a Mr. Anderson, an artist, and an intimate friend of Percy's. They met in Paris, and it seems he and Priscilla fell in love with each other at once, but she was afraid to tell her parents, fearing they would object to the marriage, as

he is studying in Paris, and expects to live abroad for some years. Mrs. Wallace says they were rather distressed at first, but Percy speaks in such high terms of his friend, and Priscilla is so very happy and so much in love, that they don't feel they have any right to withhold their consent. So Mr. Anderson is to come over here next month, and they are to be married in the autumn."

There was a short pause. Ruth would have liked to make some remark, but words did not come very easily just then. Nellie was the first to speak.

"I met Dorothy Allen on my way home. She inquired particularly about you, and told me to tell you she will be over to see you again to-morrow. She is such a nice girl."

"Did she say anything about Miss Wallace's engagement?" Ruth asked, and though she did her best to speak naturally, her voice shook a little.

"Oh, yes; she had heard all about it from Miss Priscilla herself, and she was really quite excited on the subject. She said they had all

set their hearts on Miss Wallace's marrying Percy."

Mrs. Campbell glanced rather sharply at her sister-in-law as she spoke, but Ruth's face was a blank, and, after waiting for a moment, she went on :—

"Dorothy says Percy seemed much amused when he learned of the little romance his family have been constructing for him, and utterly refused to pose as a rejected lover."

Still no remark from Ruth, and after waiting in silence for some moments, Mrs. Campbell rose, and took up her parasol.

"I am going to see what the children are about," she said. "I won't be long, and if Percy should happen to drop in, be sure to keep him till I come back."

"Are you expecting him this afternoon?" Ruth inquired, taking up her book, and beginning to turn over the pages in search of her mark.

"Well, yes, that is, I met him when I was out this morning, and told him you were coming downstairs for the first time to-day. He said he thought he should call some time

this afternoon. But I must go; I am sure I hear one of the twins crying."

When her sister-in-law had left her, Ruth fixed her eyes steadily on her book, and endeavored to fix her attention as well, but oddly enough, she had not turned a single page when, at the end of fully five minutes, the gate gave another click, and another foot-step came up the gravelled walk.

"Good afternoon, Miss Ruth; I am delighted to find you able to be about again."

At the sound of the familiar voice, Ruth laid down her book. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes drooped a little, but she held out her hand, with a frank smile.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Allen; excuse my not rising, but my ankle isn't good for much yet."

"I am glad to find it is good enough to allow of your coming downstairs," returned the young man, taking the outstretched hand in his.

"I am very glad to be down, I assure you. It was anything but pleasant to be shut up in my room in this lovely weather, but Dr. Wallace was very strict; he wouldn't let me



put my foot to the ground until to-day. Nellie was here a moment ago, but she has gone to look after the children, who are having a tea party in the field back of the cottage."

"A delightful spot for an afternoon tea," said Percy, smiling. "Much pleasanter than the afternoon teas one is expected to attend in New York, where the rooms are so hot that one can scarcely breathe, and so crowded that there is scarcely standing room. Has our friend Bobby become any more reconciled to his change of circumstances?"

"I think he is beginning to approve of some of the advantages of wealth. His father has given him a bicycle, and he remarked this morning that hotels were rather nice places, especially on account of ice cream. He still objects to nurses, however, and I am afraid is leading poor Mary a life. All the rest of the family have adapted themselves to the new order of things with wonderful rapidity. Did you ever see any one so changed as Nellie?"

"She is certainly looking remarkably well, and prettier than ever. Happiness and prosperity certainly agree with her."

"Yes, and I am so glad, for she had so little real pleasure in her life. Nothing can ever spoil her; she is too good and sweet for that, and I really think she is enjoying every moment. She has been making calls this afternoon. She stopped at your house, but you were all out, and then she went to see Mrs. Wallace."

"Then I suppose she has heard the news about Priscilla."

"Yes, Mrs. Wallace told her. I believe the young man is a friend of yours."

"He is, and one of the best fellows I know," said Percy, heartily. "I am delighted with the engagement myself. Anderson and Priscilla are just suited to each other."

"Was it about her engagement that Miss Wallace was talking to you so earnestly the afternoon of the tennis party?"

"Yes, she was urging me to have a talk with her father on the subject. The doctor was at first rather disposed to object to the match, on account of Anderson's living abroad. Did you see us talking together?"

"It was just as I was leaving; I saw you sit-

ting on the bench under the apple tree. I had met Miss Wallace, so was rather interested."

There was a pause. Percy did not seem inclined to say any more about Priscilla's affairs, and Ruth was trying with all her strength to say something, but each time she opened her lips to begin, her courage failed her. It was Percy himself who at last unconsciously gave her the opening she wanted.

"Is your book interesting?" he inquired, more for the sake of keeping up the conversation than for any particular curiosity on the subject.

"Rather, but I am disgusted with the heroine, so I don't think I shall finish it."

"How has the heroine offended you?" the young man asked, smiling.

"She is so hard and unforgiving." Ruth did not smile, and her eyes did not meet her companion's as she spoke. "She has been brought up by a guardian who fairly worships her, and of whom she is very fond. At last the guardian is taken ill, and, thinking he is going to die, confesses to her that some years before he has speculated, and accidentally lost

a lot of money belonging to her father, who, in the grief over his losses, committed suicide. It was all most unfortunate, I admit, but I think the girl ought to have forgiven him."

"What did she do?" Percy asked. He was still smiling, and did not appear at all inclined to treat the subject seriously.

"Calmly walked out of the room, packed up her things, and left the house, declaring her intention of supporting herself for the future, and never seeing the poor repentant man again. I can't bear such hard, unforgiving people." There was a catch in the girl's voice as she said the last words, and Percy watched her varying expressions with growing bewilderment.

"I think myself that the young woman might have given the poor old chap another chance," he said; "especially as he had been kind to her."

"You said once that when you found a person had deceived you, you had no further use for that person."

"I said that,—when?" Percy's honest face looked puzzled, and Ruth's heart gave one great bound of sudden hope.

"It was the last evening you dined at the flat, just before you went away. Arthur had been telling us about the janitor's troubles,—how his wife had deceived him about her children. We were all rather sorry for poor Mrs. Lane, but you said you had no use for people who deceived or told lies."

Percy laughed.

"I do remember now," he said, and there was not the least sign of embarrassment in his manner. "Arthur lectured me on my harsh judgment, and made me feel rather ashamed of myself. People say a good many things they don't actually mean, you know. How did that affair turn out, by the way? I never heard any more about it."

"Lane forgave her, and consented to take the children. When we left the flat they were already installed, and Nellie made Mrs. Lane radiantly happy by giving her all Marjorie's and Bobby's cast-off clothes."

There was another short pause, and this time it was Ruth who broke it.

"That was the very last night of the old life," she said slowly. "The next morning we

heard that Uncle John was dead, and after that everything was different."

"Yes, everything was different," the young man repeated in a low voice. He was no longer smiling, and the lines around his mouth had grown suddenly firm and hard.

"Mr. Allen," said Ruth, softly, "do you never forgive people who have made mistakes, even if they are very sorry?"

"Miss Campbell, what on earth do you mean?"

"You were very good to me when I was Miss Barry and Arthur and Nellie called me their lady help," said Ruth, beginning to tremble a little; "but afterwards, when you learned that I had been playing a part, had deceived every one, even my own brother,—why, things have never been quite the same since."

"But surely you did not suppose—did not dream, that I blamed you for what you did?" Percy's voice was low and agitated, and he had actually grown rather pale. Ruth felt her courage rising wonderfully.

"What else could I think?" she inquired

simply, meeting the young man's troubled gaze unhesitatingly. "You never came to bid me good-by. You never even saw me again after you heard the news, until we met here last week. I thought you were angry; I—I thought you despised me."

"Miss Campbell," said Percy, and his face was grave and earnest enough now, "if I had dreamed for one moment that you would have thought that, I would have endured any amount of suffering rather than have gone away as I did. I felt sure you would understand."


"I don't see what there was to understand."

"Don't you? Surely you realize the tremendous difference your uncle's death made to me."

"No," said Ruth, quietly, "I don't."

"Then I will tell you, though I may be doing wrong even in explaining myself now. Ruth, I must call you that once, though I promise faithfully never to do it again, when we were together so much last spring I grew to care for you more than for anything else in the world. That afternoon in the park I was

going to ask you to be my wife. I would have spoken before, but until I had sold one of my pictures I did not feel that I had the right; I was too poor, and my future was too uncertain. If Marjorie had not interrupted us, I should have told you everything that day. I fully intended doing so the next morning, and I came to the flat for the purpose of asking you to go out with me for another walk. You know what happened, and what news Mr. Locke brought. That news changed everything. What right had I, a poor, struggling artist, to ask an heiress to marry me? I think I was half mad at first; I dared not trust myself to see you. I made my plans, took my ticket, and was halfway across the Atlantic, before I had come fully to my senses. But even then, the more I thought of what I had done the more sure I felt that it was right. You were so young and I was afraid of unconsciously influencing you. I stayed away as long as I could, and then the restless desire to be at home again brought me back. Now you know the whole story, but you mustn't let it trouble you. I am going to work very hard,





and you know they say there is nothing like plenty of hard work for helping a heartache. I shall always be your friend if you will let me, and though we may never refer to this subject again, I want you to know that I shall never stop caring, and that if I can ever be of any help to you —”

He paused abruptly, and rose to his feet.

“I think I had better go now,” he said unsteadily. “I will come back later; perhaps this evening. Tell Arthur that if I shouldn’t see him to-night, I shall be ready to go fishing with him in the morning, as we planned.”

He was moving away, but a light, detaining hand was on his arm. Ruth’s face was quivering with some strange emotion, but there was a bright, glad light in her eyes.

“Don’t go, Percy,” she whispered softly, “please don’t. I don’t care anything about the money; it can’t make any difference — it mustn’t, because — because I love you, Percy.”





